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# A Western Canadian University Leadership Response to Human-made and Natural Crises: Strategies and Challenges.

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A Western Canadian University Leadership Response to Human-made and Natural Crises:  
Strategies and Challenges.

by

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A THESIS

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative narrative research examined how senior higher education leaders in a large western Canadian university responded to human-made and natural crises. The literature review establishes a theoretical framework for crisis leadership in higher education examining prior research in leadership theories, crisis, crisis leadership, competencies, leadership and crises in higher education, crisis management processes in higher education, crisis communication, internally displaced people and support for crisis leaders. Purposive snowball sampling technique was used in conjunction with face-to-face semi-structured interviews, field texts, and online documents in this narrative inquiry. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven senior leaders in a higher education institution, the city's emergency response agency and an elementary school adjacent to the university. Participants were selected based on their positions, expertise and their active involvement in crisis management teams, and in certain internal processes such as preparation, planning and collaborations. The data from the study was presented in the form of rich thick descriptions to allow for deep, holistic, rich, and detailed understanding of the lived experiences of these leaders' response to crises. My findings suggest that both the makeup of a crisis management team, and the leader's prior crisis management experiences and competencies were crucial to handling any type of crisis. In addition, a higher education crisis competency model was created from the responses of crisis leaders. The crisis competency model may be potentially important for building trust to move an institution forward through crisis response. This model can be useful in training sessions for higher education leaders for developing an understanding of the types of competencies required for crisis response and management. The findings also suggest that higher education crisis leaders were not always attentive to taking care of themselves or getting support for their mental health and self-care after

crisis response as they might have been. Without proper self-care and mental health care, crisis leaders could be susceptible to emotional triggers that could activate depression, fear, mental health concerns and sadness. Establishing protocols for personalized self-care and mental health care could prepare educational crisis leaders to deal with the next crisis they will most likely face.

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this Doctoral Dissertation to my heavenly Father without His strength and love this journey would have been arduous. To my sons Ejiro and Tega. You have both been my inspiration on this journey. Your faith and love has encouraged me throughout the thesis process.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Financial crises, natural disasters, conflict, turmoil, riots, terrorism, school shootings and health warnings dominate current headlines and highlight the reality that social or geographical boundaries no longer limit the reach of crises. A situation that one region may face today will likely affect another community, country, or continent tomorrow (Gainey, 2009; Rosenthal, Boin, & Comfort, 2001). Governments and postsecondary institution leaders are continuously being tested for their competence in governing, preventing, and managing crises. Whether an organization survives a crisis with its reputation intact is determined less by the severity of the crisis than by leadership, timeliness, and effectiveness of response (Demiroz & Kapucu 2012; Ivănescu 2010). When there is a failure to respond, govern effectively, or manage a crisis, the result can be a loss of legitimacy, system breakdown, chaos with far-reaching consequences and uncontrollable outcomes (Farazmand, 2009; Rao, Eisenberg & Schmitt, 2007).

Over the past decade, there has been an increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events and related damages, such as multiple hurricanes in the Gulf Coast, floods in Calgary, California, and Massachusetts, forest fires in Alberta, British Columbia, California and tornadoes in the Caribbean, Mexico, Costa Rica and even Ottawa, Canada. Additionally, we have witnessed many human directed attacks such as multiple school shootings and stabbings; for example, in the United States so far this year 2019, there have been 22 multiple school shootings where someone was either killed or wounded. Tragedies include a student who was shot at the Savannah State University in May 2019, and in STEM School Highlands Ranch Colorado in May 2019, a student died, and eight others were injured in a shooting. In Santa Fe Texas, 10 students and teachers were killed in May 2018, in February same year in Florida, 17 students and

teachers were shot and killed, in April 2014 five university students were killed in Calgary and the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007.

Spellings, Price and Modzeleski (2009) observed that due to the increase in violent crimes, natural disasters, and other crises, colleges and universities have convened committees and task forces to re-examine and conduct a comprehensive review of policies, procedures, and systems related to campus safety and security. Regardless of the location, students, staff, and parents all count on higher education leaders to respond with haste and urgency and to move the organization forward in the event of a crisis by having contingency plans in place. If ever there was a time for crisis leadership in higher education, that time is now, given that the stakes are so high. Unfortunately, little is known about how those in higher education leadership positions choose to respond to crisis situations; therefore, this study is timely and important for understanding how higher education senior leaders respond to crises.

## **Background and Context**

Crises can be sudden, disrupt routines of systems, and make significant lasting impact on people's lives and property. Such was the case in the three examples of crises below and these three examples form the context for this study. In addition, the institution studied is a large public research university with a student population of over 33,000 and more than 5000 employees.

### **The flood 2013.**

In a large city in western Canada, heavy rains and a still partially frozen landscape unable to soak up the unprecedented deluge combined with steep, rocky topography, and limited lake and reservoir storage made the watersheds vulnerable to rapid and intense flooding. Intense

flooding flowed through the center of the city at a rate comparable to that of Niagara Falls (Davison & Powers, 2013; Nielson, 2015). The possibility of aid from nearby communities was virtually nonexistent because of the widespread nature of the flooding. The City was at the nexus of a crisis area that spread approximately 100 miles in every direction (Nielson, 2015).

#### **The murders 2014.**

In the early morning hours of April 15, 2014, five young people were stabbed to death at a house party in a quiet suburban neighborhood. The tragedy happened as the victims were celebrating the end of university classes (Geddes, 2015), just before the beginning of exams.

#### **The wildfire 2016.**

Wildfire hazard conditions were severe in early 2016, across Western Canada. The wildfire started on May 1, 2016 in a forested area that was approximately two hectares in size. It quickly became one of the worst wildfires experienced in recent Canadian history. Within two days the wildfire had grown, threatening the nearby city, first nations communities, oil sands camps and facilities, critical infrastructure, and other important assets. As a result of the wildfire, almost 88,000 people were evacuated from the Region in a very short period of time (KPMG, 2016).

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Crises are marked by chaos, time constraints, ambiguity, remarkably unusual circumstances, limited or conflicting information, media pressure, circulating social media, curious onlookers, stress, and a need for immediate and decisive action (Boin & 't Hart, 2003; James & Wooten, 2011). Given these pressures, the demands of a leader in crisis can be unique and require a different set of abilities than would typically be expected during general day-to-day



leadership (James & Wooten, 2011). Unfortunately, good leadership does not automatically operate in a crisis.

Multiple studies have been conducted on leadership and crises management in business organizations, however, there is little research on how higher education senior leaders respond to and manage crises, even though there has been an increase in crises in higher education settings in the past ten years. Investigating the gap in research on higher education senior leadership response to crises will assist higher education leaders in the process of preparing for, responding, managing, and overcoming the devastating effect of crisis in their settings and community. Operations at a large university in western Canada have been affected in three different recent crises situations: the flood, a wildfire and student murders.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to explore how higher education senior leaders responded to human-made and natural crises. Firsthand accounts were gathered from key stake holders in the institution's decision making and disaster response team, external partners who were directly involved in responding to the three different crises: the flood, student murders and a wildfire. The goal of the study was to help current and future educational leaders better understand crises situations and how they can prepare for future issues.

### **Research Question**

How did senior leaders in a large western Canadian higher education institution respond to unpredictable human-made and natural crises?

## **Overview of Methodology**

This qualitative research employed a narrative inquiry methodology to investigate how senior leaders in a large western Canadian higher education institution responded to unpredictable human-made and natural crises. The use of the qualitative research methodology allowed for a deeper, holistic, and more in-depth understanding of the phenomena than using a quasi-experimental design that has dominated crisis leadership research (Conger 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Conger (1999) suggested an increased use of descriptive, qualitative research to dig deeper into contextual leadership issues. Eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior leaders. The target population for the semi-structured interviews were senior leaders in a crisis management team, and members of the emergence operations group in a higher education institution, an elementary school vice-principal and a senior leader in the city's emergency management agency. These leaders were involved in the evacuation, emergency response, media, and communication in a city in western Canada.

A narrative inquiry approach was utilized as a method of inquiry into how higher education leaders responded to crises. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argued that narrative inquiry works in studies of educational experience, because of its focus on experience, the qualities of life and education thereby, allowing for practical, specific insights into the phenomenon to be studied (Creswell, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. The use of semi-structured interviews encouraged a more open exploration of the topic and allowed the interviewees to express their stories, opinions, and ideas in their own words (Chase, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Data was analyzed for retelling. Retelling allowed for gathering of participants stories and analyzing

them for key elements of the story. The key elements of the stories were then analyzed for themes. The identification of themes provides the complexity of a story and adds depth to the insight about understanding individual experiences (Creswell, 2015).

### **Rationale and Significance of the Study**

Crisis management can be hard for educational institutions because crises are infrequent and often unpredictable (McCullar, 2011). Higher education institutions are not immune to crisis and this reality has reinforced the need to study crisis leadership and crisis management in these institutions. Crises in our current society makes the importance of crisis leadership clear and highlights the need for leaders in higher education with a unique collection of characteristics.

This study provides a model that can be used as a learning tool for current and future higher education leaders. The findings, insights, and experiences from this study is useful in advancing the knowledge base in the field of crisis leadership in higher education and leadership response to human-made and natural disasters.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In this study using a qualitative narrative inquiry provided opportunity for deep, holistic, rich, and detailed understanding of the lived experiences of senior higher education leaders response to crises. The semi-structured interviews, field text, documents, member checking, and rich thick descriptions allowed for rigorous data collection and analysis cycles which strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings of this study. Nonetheless, there are a few limitations to consider when reviewing the study.

1. The sample size for data collection were intentionally limited to senior leaders involved in crisis response.

2. A sample size of eleven participants were interviewed, therefore, generalizability may be limited.
3. The participants were selected based on their positions and their active involvement in the crisis management team, and in certain internal processes; such as preparation, and planning.
4. Participants were situated in one location in western Canada.

### **Identity and Role of the Researcher**

Denzin et al. (2011) pointed out that research is an interactive process shaped by one's personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the research setting. I agree, as I see myself as part of my research and recognize that I need to be transparent when discussing my perspective which originates from my experiences. I managed two major human-made crises as an individual, leader and educator. The first experience happened in 2001 in the city of Jos in the Northern part of Nigeria, where my family and I experienced deadly, life threatening religious riots, and we had to flee our home with just the clothes on our back. The leadership response to the crisis was inadequate. There were no procedures prepared, or a protocol for evacuation nor a safe place to host evacuees and the general lack of crisis management resulted in unnecessary loss of lives. There was a major crisis in leadership.

As an educator, I relived the experience of insecurity and crisis a second time. Between the periods of 2012 and 2015, the religious sect of Boko Haram struck terror and pain into the hearts of many teachers and students in northern Nigeria. They inflicted various spates of kidnappings, bombings, and there was a high tension of fear. As an educator working in

conjunction with other educators and peers, we developed emergency response procedures including lock-downs, fire drills, bomb evacuations, and created emergency response policies, while continuing to get the job of teaching and educating our students done. The safety of our students and staff was our utmost priority.

When I arrived at the university as a doctoral student in leadership and learned about the flood in 2013, the murders in 2014 and the wildfires in 2016, I began to wonder about the leadership experiences, competencies of a crisis leader and preparedness in these different contexts. This research interest led to my hope to work with leaders who were involved in managing these crises, to learn and understand about their leadership response to crises. Thus, my quest began to find out how leaders in a large western Canadian university responded to human-made and natural crises.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are used throughout this dissertation, and thus I provide an operational definition of each in this section.

Crisis: An organizational crisis is a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and simultaneously present an organization with both opportunities for and threats to its high-priority goals (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2015).

Leadership: leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of people to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007)

Crisis leadership: is a series of dynamic behaviors, from prevention, to response to post events through management levels to protect the organization, and its people (Boin & t' Hart, 2003).

Crisis Management: the sum of activities aimed at minimizing the impact of a crisis. The impact of a crisis is measured in terms of damage to people, critical infrastructure, and public institutions (Boin, Kuipers & Overdijk, 2013).

Crisis communication: can be defined as the dialog between an organization, the public, government leaders, internal and external stakeholders within the organization, prior to, during, and after a crisis. The dialog details strategies and tactics designed to minimize damage to people, critical infrastructure, and public institutions (Fearn-Banks, 2016).

Bicameral governance: is where the responsibility for administrative and fiscal matters is assigned to a corporate governing body, and the responsibility for academic matters is assigned to a senate or its equivalent consisting of university personnel (Pennock, Jones, Leclerc & Li, 2012).

Internally displaced people (IDPs): are forced to flee their home but never cross an international border. These individuals seek safety anywhere they can find it—in nearby towns, schools, settlements, internal camps, even forests and fields. IDPs include people displaced by internal strife and natural disasters. Unlike refugees, IDPs are not protected by international law or eligible to receive many types of aid because they are legally under the protection of their own government (United Nations Refugee Agency, 2018).

### **Chapter summary**

The focus of this research was to develop a deeper understanding of how higher education leaders respond to crises. This study provides detailed information on higher education leaders' experiences, challenges, and strategies in handling crisis situations. This study employed a qualitative research methodology using a narrative inquiry approach and captured participants

experiences as higher education crisis leaders as shared during interviews. The findings of this study have the potential to expand the dialogue concerning crisis-leadership in institutions of higher education. The second chapter presents a more in-depth explanation and review of the relevant literature that provides a foundation for the current research.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The intent of this literature review was to establish a theoretical framework for crisis leadership in higher education. I explored prior research in related and salient areas of the study, examined the history of leadership research in relevant literatures, and elucidated the similarities and gaps in the literature base. Attention is paid to synthesizing prior research into a coherent whole.

The chapter includes four main themes that emerged from the literature readings: (a) leadership; (b) crisis and crises; (c) leadership in higher education; (d) internally displaced people; and (e) support for crisis leaders. The leadership section highlights historical leadership theories and evolves to include the more current theories of team leadership. The crisis section covers definitions of crisis, crisis leadership, crisis leadership competencies and crises in higher education. The next section on leadership in higher education focuses on crisis leadership teams, crisis management processes in higher education, crisis leaders and crisis communication, crisis communication tools and reputational risk in higher education. The penultimate section covers internally displaced people because of crises (IDP) and the final section discusses support for crisis leaders.

### **Leadership**

Leadership research studies have mainly taken place in business organizations, the military and government agencies with fewer studies in higher education. Birnbaum (1988) noted that leadership studies can be more difficult to carry out in higher education due to the dual control systems, conflicts between professional and administrative authority, unclear goals, and



other unique properties of professional normative organizations. For the context of this study leadership theories in organizational context will be examined.

In the past 20 years the field of leadership has focused not only on leaders alone, but also on followers, peers, supervisors, work setting/context, culture and neuroscience of leadership (Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009; Everly, 2016). Northouse (2013) defined “leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p.5). Yukl (2006) concurred that leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done, and how to do it. Yukl (2006) further emphasized leadership as the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives. Influence, according to Northouse (2013), implied reciprocal relationship between the leaders and followers, but the relationship could be characterized by domination, control, or induction of compliance by the leader. Thus, leadership as both a process and influence, implies a symbiotic relationship between the leader and the follower. Leadership is not a linear process, but an interactive activity with the intentionality of achieving together.

### **An overview of leadership theories.**

Leadership theories endeavored to explain emergent factors of leadership or leadership nature and implications. Early in the leadership scientific research tradition, leadership was initially based on the idea that certain individuals were endowed with traits and attributes that distinguished them as leaders. Stogdill (1974) identified six primary categories associated with leadership: (a) capacity, (b) achievement, (c) responsibility, (d) participation, (e) status, and (f) situation. Although trait theory dominated scientific leadership research in the early stages, it was rejected for its inability to offer clear distinctions between leaders and non-leaders and for

its failure to account for situational variance in leadership behavior (Zaccaro, 2007). In addition, Buchanan and Huczynski (1985) pointed out that the problem in attempting to classify leadership capabilities was that research had been unable to identify a common and agreed upon set of attributes. Stogdill (1974) concluded that, "A person does not become a leader by the possession of some combination of traits" (p. 64). In contrast to trait theory, the behavioral leadership theory attempted to explain distinctive styles used by effective leaders through the nature of their work (Goff, 2003). Birnbaum (1988) explained that behavioral theory examined leadership patterns, managerial roles, and behavioral categories of leaders, meaning what leaders actually do rather than their qualities (Davalos, 2016).

### **Contingency theories.**

Authors of contingency theories of leadership advocated that the best way to lead was to have an interface of the leader's traits, the leader's behaviors, and the situation in which the leader exists (Horner, 1997). These theories assumed that the effects of one variable on leadership are contingent on other variables (Horner, 1997). The importance of situational factors such as the nature of task, or external environment was emphasized (Birnbaum, 1988). Contingency theories include Fiedler's contingency model, situational leadership, and cognitive resource theory. While these contingency models improved the understanding of effective leadership, Tarantelli (2008) argued that the models did not successfully clarify the specific combination of personality characteristics, leaders' behaviors, or situational variables that are most effective for leaders or effective leadership during crises.

### **Transformational leadership.**

This theory has its pedigree and origins in Burns' (1978) publication in which he analyzed the ability of some political leaders, across many types of organizations, to engage with staff in ways that inspired them to new levels of energy, commitment, and moral purpose. Burns (1978) argued that this energy and commitment to a common vision transformed the organization by developing its capacity to work collaboratively to overcome challenges and reach ambitious goals. Burns conceived leaders to either be transformational or transactional (Burns, 1978). Transactional leaders exchanged tangible rewards for the work and loyalty of followers, and transformational leaders engaged with followers, focused on higher order intrinsic needs, and raised consciousness about the significance of specific outcomes and new ways in which those outcomes might be achieved (Barnett, McCormick & Conners, 2001; Gellis, 2001; Griffin, 2007). Tichy and Devanna (1986) described transformational leadership as more than being charismatic, it was systematic, purposeful, and organized; a behavioral process that could be learned and managed.

Avolio, Waldman, and Yammarino (1991) categorized transformational leadership into four I's: idealized influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Interestingly, as Martin de Bussy and Paterson (2012) noted, leaders who possessed charisma could exercise far greater levels of influence over their followers and followers who perceived their leaders to be charismatic are likely to place more confidence and trust in them. The transformational leader is therefore, attentive, motivates and helps followers to achieve their best potential, provide vision and a sense of mission.

Although transformational leadership has produced a high level of follower motivation, commitment, and a well-above-average organizational performance, it is not without its flaws (Bryant, 2003). One of such flaws is the morality of transformational leaders (Griffin, 2003). Because transformational leaders motivate followers by appealing to strong emotions regardless of the ultimate effects on followers, there is a potential for abuse of power (Hay, 2006; Northouse, 2013). In other words, transformational leadership lacks the checks and balances of countervailing interests, influences and power that might help to avoid dictatorship and oppression of a minority by a majority (Bass, 1997). It is important to realize that the influence of transformational leaders may lead to abuse by leaders who have narcissistic tendencies, thriving on power and manipulation of followers (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Another key flaw of transformational leadership is that it regarded leadership as a personality trait or personal predisposition rather than a learned behavior (Bryman, 1992). Assuming that leadership is a trait, then, training people in this approach becomes difficult and problematic, because how do you teach people to change their traits? (Northouse, 2010).

### **Servant leadership.**

In the past few years, leadership studies have shifted focus from transformational leadership and placed stronger emphasis on shared, relational, and global perspective, where especially the interaction between leader and follower are key elements (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). van Dierendonck (2011) noted that servant leadership is focused on the ideal of service in the leader–follower relationship. Servant leadership adds the component of social responsibility to transformational leadership (Graham 1991). Importantly, the theory emphasized

the needs of followers (Patterson, 2003). Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990) first introduced the servant leadership concept among modern organizational theorists. In Greenleaf's (1977) words:

It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead... The best test, and difficult to administer is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or at least not further be harmed? (p. 1230).

Greenleaf (1977) argued that a leader's individual characteristics, not their leadership techniques, will cause them to choose to lead or serve first. In other words, the servant-leader purposefully shares power, places the needs of individuals first, enables them to perform and grow (Gandolfi et al., 2016). Therefore, the servant leader's first responsibilities were relationships and people, and those relationships took precedence over the task and product (Lubin, 2001).

It is interesting to note that Greenleaf did not provide any definitions of servant leadership. Instead, as Smith, Montagno and Kuzmenko (2004) observed Greenleaf focused on specific behaviors of a servant leader, and on the servant leader's influence on followers. In recent times, researchers have begun to examine the conceptual foundations of servant leadership to build a theory about it. Such researchers as Patterson (2003) created a value-based model of seven leadership constructs that shape the servant leaders' attitudes, characteristics, and behaviors. Similarly, Russell and Stone (2002) developed 9 functional characteristics and 11 additional characteristics of servant leadership. Servant leadership has made positive

contributions to the field of research, but the paradoxical nature of the title “servant leadership” has created semantic noise that diminishes the potential value of the approach (Northouse, 2013).

In conclusion, although the leadership models listed above have improved the understanding of leadership, they have not successfully clarified the specific combination of personality characteristics, leaders' behaviors, or situational variables that are most effective for leaders or effective leadership during a time of crisis (Bishop, 2013). These traditional leadership models ignore environmental and situational conditions and assume that good leadership transcends context (Muffet-Willett, 2010). Leadership models that are effective in organizations in an everyday context and situation, may not automatically fit in a crisis. Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch (2002) argued that different leadership models should fit different contexts.

### **Definition of Crisis**

Crises have no borders or boundaries. Over the past decade, we have witnessed a rise in crises both natural and man-made (Jackson, 2011). On December 26, 2004, an Indian Ocean undersea earthquake caused massive tsunamis that killed more than 225,000 people in Asia (Jackson, 2011). In May 2008, an earthquake struck China killing over 69,000 people (Jackson, 2011). Multiple hurricanes in the Gulf Coast, an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, floods in Calgary, California, and Massachusetts, forest fires in Alberta and British Columbia, and more recently tornadoes in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Costa Rica, constituted major crises.

Additionally, we have witnessed human-made crises such as multiple school shootings, one of the most recent include a shooting at the Savannah State University in May 2019 where a student died, a shooting at STEM School Highlands Ranch Colorado which left one student dead, and eight others injured in May 2019. In Santa Fe, Texas, 10 students and teachers were killed in

May 2018, Florida school shooting in February 2018, where 17 students and teachers were killed, and the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007. Rosenthal, Charles, and 't Hart (1989) warned that crisis produces periods of upheaval and collective stress, disturbing everyday patterns and threatening core values and structures of a social system in unexpected, often unconceivable ways. Prewitt and Weil (2014) postulated that a crisis had a life cycle and should be seen as a “dangerous opportunity” (Ulmer, et al., 2015).

Crises occur when core values or vital systems of a community come under *threat* such as safety and security, welfare and health, integrity, and fairness (Boin, McConnell, & 't Hart, 2010). A crisis could be a workplace violence situation, a major disaster (Muffet-Willett, 2010) or a situation such as the Brentwood slayings in Calgary in 2014. There are various definitions of crisis available and a shared definition is yet to be solidified in literature but for the purposes of this study, I will be using a more recent working definition of crisis by Ulmer et al. (2015, p. 8):

An organizational crisis is a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and simultaneously present an organization with both opportunities for and threats to its high-priority goals.

**Table 1**

*Components of the Working Definition of Organizational Crisis*

Unexpected	An event comes as a surprise. This surprise is something for which the organization could not have anticipated or planned for and could result from conditions that may exceed the organization's crisis management plans.
Non-routine	Because problems occur daily in all organizations, organizations engage in routine procedures, but a crisis requires unique and often extreme measures.
Produces uncertainty	A crisis produces tremendous uncertainty because they are unexpected and require more than routine actions. Efforts to reduce uncertainty may continue for months.
Creates opportunities	A crisis creates opportunities to learn, make strategic changes, and develop new competitive advantages.
Threat to image or reputation or high priority goals	Crises can produce an intense level of threat to the organization and its affiliates and can be threatening enough to permanently destroy the image or reputation of the organization.

*Note.* Adapted from Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2015).

Mitroff (2004) pointed out four key factors to consider during a crisis: (a) crisis types- the set of crises that an organization prepares for; (b) crisis mechanisms- may include early warning signals detection, damage control systems and business recovery systems and so forth; (c) crisis systems- enfold the mechanisms by which a crisis unrolls; and (d) crisis stakeholders- stakeholders are all the various parties, institutions, and societies, that affect and are affected by a major crisis.

**Crisis in Higher Education**

Higher education institutions have been beset by an increasing number of crises and shootings that have seriously damaged their infrastructures, reputations and prestige (Mitroff, 2006; Wang & Hutchins, 2010). Recently, attention has been focused on incidents of shootings/mass murders on college and university campuses and it seems difficult to find a



solution to this ever-growing threat that hinders academic life (Myers, 2017). In a study conducted by Citizens Crime Commission of New York City (2016) on shootings in college campuses, they looked at 190 incidents where at least one person was shot in 142 colleges from 2000 to 2016 school year. The study found that during the first five school years (2001 to 2005), there were a total of 40 recorded shooting incidents on or near college campuses. In 2006 to 2010 school years, there was a 23 percent increase in incidents recorded. However, during the next five school years (2011 to 2016), school shootings doubled increasing by 153 percent. Based on the current trends, the likelihood of a continued increase in this problem is inferred. There is a dire need for universities to develop an effective strategy to prevent the occurrence of this crisis or reduce the impact if one occurs. Examples of universities with school shootings include the Virginia Tech campus, Savannah State University, University of Oregon, University of North Carolina, Grambling State University dorm and several high schools and elementary schools (Lou & Walker, 2019; Zdziarski, Dunkel, & Rollo, 2007).

Other examples of school shootings found in Canada include a shooting in January 2016, a 17-year-old boy shot and killed two brothers, two teachers and wounded seven others in a local school in northern Saskatchewan; in April 2014 in Calgary, five students were killed. Dawson College shooting in September 2006, one person died and 19 were wounded; the shooting at Concordia university in August 1992, an engineering professor shot and killed four of his colleagues and the shooting at Montreal's École Polytechnique in December 1989, where a student shot 28 people and killed 14 women (Chin, 2017; Wang & Hutchins, 2010).

With heightened attention on college campuses as a result of an increase in shootings, the image of colleges and universities as safe and secure environments has been shaken (Myers,

2017). Wang and Hutchins (2010) noted that when news of these crises make national headlines, prospective students and their parents may reconsider enrolling or withdrawing their applications from the institutions associated with the crisis events.

In addition to school shootings there has been other types of crisis such as the sexual assault cases in the University of Colorado in 2000; University of British Columbia in 2013; University of Ottawa's men's hockey team in 2014; York university in 2017; and the harassment of female cadets at the Air Force Academy. Other types of crisis include floods in Calgary in June 2013, Toronto in July 2013 and High River in June 2013; in Drumheller and Fort Vermillion in April 2018. Furthermore, fires have occurred in Slave Lake in May 2011, Fort McMurray in May 2016, British Columbia in July 2017, the Texas A&M University bonfire disaster that killed 12 students and injured 27 others in 1999, and a residence hall fire at Interlaken University that claimed the lives of three students (Global News, 2018; Tamburri & Samson, 2014; Wang & Hutchins, 2010). According to The Data Team (2017) the number of disasters worldwide has more than quadrupled to around 400 a year, since 1970. Another source of crisis is student suicides which is currently the second most common cause of death among college students aged 25-34 (American College Health Association, 2017). The list of crises is endless and each of these crises have had a negative effect on universities and colleges especially if the crisis occurs either on or near the university campus.

These crises situations raise the question of whether colleges and universities can timely prepare and respond to crisis events while still maintaining a culture of inclusivity and open access. Thus, for administrators of educational institutions, it is crucial to develop an effective

emergency response plan that would likely prevent the occurrence of a crisis event or minimize the impact if one occurs (Wang & Hutchins 2010).

### **Crisis Leadership**

The rise in crisis leadership has been due, at least in part, to an increase in the rate of crises events in the world such as Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Irma, Paris flood, Calgary flood, Fort McMurray fire and school shootings/murders to name a few. According to Muffet-Willett (2010) organizational leaders' who are adept at handling day-to-day issues may not necessarily prove to be as qualified and prepared to manage crisis situations such as these major natural and man-made situations. In today's context, leadership has become an art, and crisis situations require some new leadership practices. Avolio and Gardner (2005) warned that leadership is facing challenges and a need for renewed focus on restoring confidence, hope, optimism, and resiliency is required. There is a need for crisis leadership, as people search for meaning and connection before, during and after a crisis. Crisis leadership is based upon several inherent assumptions that: (a) a crisis is acute, and dangerous; (b) a crisis can, with appropriate responses, be managed in such a way as to lessen its real or potential negative impact; (c) without some strategic responses, the nature of a crisis can expand quickly and dangerously; and (d) crisis responders—the leaders, individually, and collectively, hold the key to whether or not a crisis is contained successfully (Jones, 2010, p. 22).

Crisis leadership can be defined as the “capability to lead under extreme pressure” (James & Wooten, 2011, p. 61). A more inclusive definition of crises leadership by Boin and t' Hart (2003) is a series of dynamic behaviors, from prevention, to response to post events through

management levels to protect the organization and its people. In James and Wooten (2011, p. 61)

crisis leadership is seen as:

A frame of mind accompanied by a key set of behaviors; which include openness to new experiences, willingness to learn and take risks, an assumption that all things are possible, and a belief that even in times of crisis, people and organizations can emerge better off after the crisis than before.

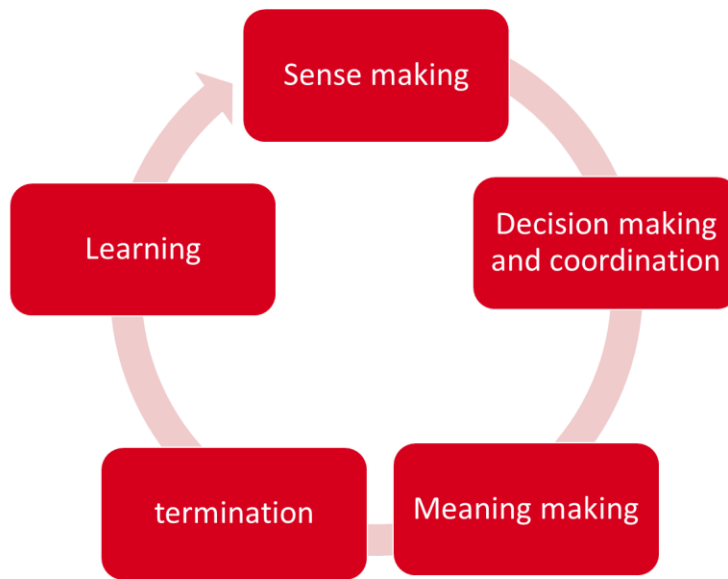
The crisis leadership frame of mind is important because in a crisis, quick judgments must be made; standards need to be redefined; options, plans and strategies need to be established; power relationships remodeled; awareness created; and responses made immediately (Lagadec, 1993; Trainor & Velotti, 2013). In this context, the crisis leader must therefore, permanently plan, learn, and give feedback to reduce harm down to the lowest level of the organization (Hong-Cheng, 2014). Furthermore, the crisis leader helps to reduce the turmoil of crisis, reasserts order and control as well as becomes visible to the public and the media (Ulmer, et al., 2015). The crisis leader therefore, becomes the rallying point for crisis management and control and is responsible for responding to threats, uncertainties, and worry especially because people are cautious when it comes to crises, and they are also guileless about the complexities that arise in a crisis, and they therefore depend on their leaders for safety and direction. Liu and Wang (2006) explained that part of the role of the crisis leader is to eliminate people's doubts, be well-prepared, take effective measures to protect the public, restrain harm, and compensate losses. Under these circumstances the crisis leader is expected to manage before, during, and after a crisis. The "before" stage is the development of skills and capabilities to manage a crisis, the "during" is the enactment of pre-crisis capabilities and the after stage is reassessment of

performance (Mitroff, 2004, p. 5). The leader's ability to adapt to a changing and complex environment is a key foundation of crisis leadership (Muffet-Willett, 2010).

### **Crisis Leadership Competencies**

Bolman and Deal (1997) identified crisis leadership competencies as decision making, communication, creating organizational capabilities, sustaining an effective organizational culture, managing multiple constituencies, and developing human capital. Kapucu and Van Wart (2008) explained that several leadership competencies are important for managing crises. They argued that though leadership may cover various responsibilities and competencies, that, in a crisis, specific competencies were required. It is therefore, imperative that the crisis leader in a higher education institution ask the “what I need to know question (what competencies are necessary for job performance?) and how much do I need to know question (what the required level of mastery for each competency is?)” (Shaw & Harrald, 2006, p. 10). Wayne Blanchard, coordinator of the FEMA higher education project at Emergency Management Institute/FEMA identified three core areas that crisis leaders be competent in: (a) leadership and team building, (b) networking and coordination, (c) political, bureaucratic, and social context (as cited in Patton 2007, p. 81). Kapucu and Van Wart (2008, p. 717-718) expanded crisis leadership competencies to include: (a) decisiveness, (b) flexibility (c) informing, (d) problem solving, (e) managing innovation and creativity, (f) planning and organizing personnel, (g) motivating, (h) managing teams and team building, (i) scanning the environment, (j) strategic planning, (k) networking and partnering, and (l) decision making. Additionally, crisis leaders should be firm and possess established protocols, but also be creative, willing to improvise, share information and be well-acquainted with all departments and agencies that will have a role to play in crisis control.

The development of crisis leadership competences is crucial, because the crisis leader is faced with five key challenges (Boin, t' Hart, Stern, & Sundelius, 2005, p. 10-15): (a) Sense Making – this involves developing an adequate interpretation of a complex, dynamic, and ambiguous crisis; Making sense of the crisis, creating a picture of what is happening, and handling the preparation process to eliminate any factors that could have been avoided; (b) Decision Making and Coordinating Implementation – refers to the fact that crises tend to be experienced by leaders and followers; quick and effective decisions on how to handle the crises and make sure that they reach out to the community and gather as many interested crisis responders as possible need to be made; (c) Meaning Making – leaders are in the limelight to direct the public in the right direction. It is their ultimate responsibility to motivate the community to believe that they will get through this situation. By their words and deeds, leaders can convey images of competence, control, stability, sincerity, decisiveness, and vision or their opposites; (d) Terminating – finding a way to end the crisis and keep the affected parties on track to eventually achieve closure and an opportunity to return to normalcy; (e) Learning – this requires an active, critical process that recreates, analyzes, and evaluates key procedures, tactics, and techniques to enhance performance, safety, capability, and so on. It is imperative that the leader evaluates the situation and comes up with lessons that can be learned from either the shortfalls or the successes of the entire response efforts.



**Figure 1. Five key challenges of a crisis leader (Boin, t' Hart, Stern, & Sundelius, 2005)**

Although the five leadership tasks outlined above clarify the core challenges leaders must tackle and what competencies would be needed, Stern (2013) argued that there was a missing piece to the task and this piece was preparing. Preparing consists of several subtasks: (a) Organizing and Selecting - it is important to select suitable staff for key functions, roles, structures, and processes during a crisis. There is no one size fits all in organizational planning, rather crisis planning should be based on the organization's characteristics and context; (b) Planning (improvise) – refers to identifying capabilities and resources that can be deployed in novel and creative ways given the propensity for unanticipated problems in a crisis; (c) Educating, Training, and Exercising - Leaders must be (and try to ensure that their team members, key subordinates, and key partners are) educated, trained, and exercised in preparation for crisis. Education must be both conceptual, practical, and inclusive of partners not just in the organization but outside as well, such as emergence management agencies; (d) Cultivating Vigilance and Protecting Preparedness- when organizations have been spared from frequent

exposure to crisis, inertia, defense mechanisms and “it won’t happen here” syndrome can set in. To counter these, crisis leaders should actively monitor the crisis experiences of others, create, and protect budget and provide resources in the advent of a crisis and cultivate “it could happen here mindset” (Stern, 2013, p. 52-53).

In general, crisis leadership competencies are associated with key phases of prevention-mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery of the crisis management process and these competencies are acquired and honed through consistent hands on practice. Crisis leaders have crucial, specific, and strategic roles to play and they are saddled with the responsibility of determining the necessary key tasks, terminating the crisis, ensuring that the organization returns to normalcy and lessons are learned from the crisis.

### **Leadership in Higher Education**

Universities have a history that predates the modern nation state and can be traced over 850 years to the founding of the Universities of Paris and University of Bologna (Hogan & Trotter, 2013). A key function of the medieval universities was to pursue divine truth, and this function was because of the influence of religious, political, and social pressures that were instrumental in shaping leadership structures in higher education in those times (Denman, 2009; Hogan & Trotter, 2013). The modern-day structure and governance of a university system is different from the medieval times; universities often now practice a bicameral governance structure with both structures having organizational influence and control (Birnbaum, 2004; Jones, Shanahan & Goyan, 2002). The bicameral governance structure where present is highly diverse, multifaceted, and often widely dispersed. Faculty involvement in the governance process is unlike the hierarchical structure of corporate entities (Toma, 2007).



In the bicameral system, one system is based on legal authority which would include positions such as trustees, administration in the middle and the other is based on professional authority which justifies faculty and students' representation (Birnbaum, 2004; Jones et al., 2002). The provincial governments in Canada also have a role in governance and possess the basic responsibility to oversee the balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability (Jones et al., 2002). Gayle, Tewarie, and White (2003) observed that there were multiple actors involved in governance, and represented governance as concentric circles—presidents, faculty, administrators, and trustees at the core; then community, students, and alumni; and other agencies operating on the sideline.

Due to the complex governance structure of universities, Toma (2007) noted that decision-making occurred at multiple levels with certain entities having influence or authority over certain issues. Rosovsky (1990) framed governance as the competition for power involving the three most influential groups at the university—the trustees, the administration, the faculty and in addition students. The questions concerning who is in charge are often left ambiguous within the university system due to the idea of shared governance between these groups (Toma, 2007). As a result of this multilevel decision-making process and shared governance, higher education institutions may face the challenge of quick and fast decision-making and response during a crisis. Ivănescu (2010) was concerned about such a situation when he warned that speed and time is a leader's enemy in a crisis. Examples abound of the cost of slow decision-making in universities, in 2011 at Virginia tech where a student shot and killed 32 other students, Virginia tech was fined by the Department of Education for violation of the Clery Act, a law requiring colleges and universities to provide timely notification of campus safety information (CNN

Library, 2017). Another example was the shootings at Kent State University, the first to occur in a university campus in 1970, where guardsmen killed four students and injured nine others, an Ohio grand jury placed the blame on the university officials (Wallenfeldt, 2017).

When a crisis appears, like it did during the flood in 2013, the murders in 2014 and the wildfires in 2016, the usual business processes and decision rates in higher education need to be suspended, and decisions may need to be made at a faster pace. To put it another way, Duncan et al. (2010) said the need for clear lines of authority and decision-making are ever so important now in higher education. Equally important, when the decision-making process is collective and different individuals contribute to the process such as in higher education, then during a crisis, leadership must be collective, dynamic, and unifying, requiring perception and sense making skills by leaders for them to determine appropriate courses of action (Spreitzer & Quinn, 2001; Walsh, 1995; Weick, 1988).

Another issue higher education faces in crisis is the dynamics of the physical environment, structures, and complexities. Drysdale, Modzeleski and Simons (2010) explained that higher education campuses usually comprise many buildings, often with large classrooms, separate faculty for each department, and generally uncontrolled access and egress. The distributed physical environment in higher education thus makes the job of crisis leaders more challenging. In explaining the peculiarities of higher education, Duncan, Jennings and Modzeleski (2010) stated that college and university campuses often cover large geographic areas, and sometimes resemble small towns with the full extent of services in their vicinity (i.e., medical centers, sports complexes, residential centers, businesses). This array of structural and environmental characteristics often poses challenges for access control, monitoring movements,

defining boundaries for facilities and grounds, standardizing procedures, decision-making processes, and prioritizing resource allocations (Duncan et al., 2010).

### **Crisis leadership teams in higher education.**

A team is a small task group in which the members have a common purpose, interdependent roles and complementary skills (Yukl, 2006). Northouse (2010) defined teams as “organizational groups composed of members who are interdependent, who share common goals, and must coordinate their activities to accomplish those goals” (p. 241). These teams are generally cross-functional in nature (James & Wooten, 2011). The use of teams can lead to greater productivity, and effective use of resources, as groups combine skills and abilities for decision-making and problem solving (Gorton & Alston, 2012; Parker, 1990). Successful teams do not happen organically, leaders must engage in social problem solving, which, in turn, moves the team towards their objective or goal(s) (Burke, Shuffler & Wiese, 2018; Curry, 2014). Creating team processes and team dynamics are important components in effective teams (Curry, 2014).

Brumfield (2012) explained that some organizations have specific crisis management teams to deal with any organizational crisis, while others rely on the senior executive teams to handle such situations. In the higher education institution, the ability of the institution to recover substantially faster from a crisis and at much less cost will depend on the selection of a well-trained, inter-departmental crisis-management team (Mitroff, Diamond & Alpaslan, 2006; Smith, 2002). Mitroff et al. (2006) encouraged that most top executives of an organization and university such as the chief executive and financial officers and the heads of legal affairs, public affairs, security, operations, information technology, medical affairs, quality assurance, be

included as members of the crisis management team. Smith (2000) pointed out that the selection process of these top executives should consider both the relationship between personality and task and the overall cohesion of the team. Another aspect to consider is the training of these teams. Mitroff, Diamond, and Alpaslan (2006), pointed out that crisis management teams should not be formed and trained in an ad hoc manner but through regular meetings and a broad range of simulations. According to them, the best teams train together in order to function as cohesive units in the heat of an actual disaster.

### **Crisis management process in higher education.**

The extent of a crisis is typically one of immense destruction, unusual in the short term that may damage emergency response systems in terms of responding in normal ways (Kapucu & Van Wart, 2008). Crisis management takes into account the possible risks and warning signs an organization may encounter and creates a plan on how to handle them should they occur (Coombs, 2007; Lindell & Perry, 1992). Rao et al. (2007) identified crisis management as a multifaceted process aimed at minimizing the social and physical impact of these large-scale events. Spellings, Price and Modzeleski (2009) proposed that a crisis emergency management plan is based on the framework of the four phases of emergency management: prevention-mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery; all phases are highly *interconnected*, with each phase influencing the other three phases. Coombs (2015) extended the phases to include a fifth,

which he called revision. The cycle is an ongoing process as depicted in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. The five phases of crisis management (Coombs, 2015).**

Phase one- prevention and mitigation: prevention is the action colleges and universities take to decrease the likelihood that an event or crisis will occur by detecting early warning signs and acting to prevent the crisis. Mitigation is the action colleges and universities take to eliminate or reduce the loss of life and property damage related to an event or crisis, particularly those that cannot be prevented. This is an ongoing effort to reduce the physical and social impact of future disasters and includes interventions made in advance of disasters to prevent or reduce the impact (Coombs, 2015; Rao et al., 2007; Spellings, Price & Modzeleski, 2009).

Phase two-preparedness: this phase designs strategies, processes, and protocols to prepare the college or university for potential emergencies. Preparedness activities may include: (a) establishing an incident command system (ICS); (b) collaborating with community partners to establish mutual aid agreements that will establish formal interdisciplinary, intergovernmental, and interagency relationships among all the community partners and campus departments; (c)

developing plans to unify students, staff, and faculty with their families; (d) defining protocols and procedures for each type of response strategy, e.g., shelter-in-place, lockdown (if and where appropriate), or evacuation; (e) establishing an emergency notification system using multiple modes of communication to alert persons on campus that an emergency is approaching or occurred; (f) working with the media in the community and campus public relations office to develop a campus emergency communication plan that may include drafting template messages for communicating with the media, students, faculty, staff, community, and families prior to, during, and after an emergency; (g) coordinating campus emergency management plans with those of state and local agencies to avoid unnecessary duplication; (h) outlining schedules and plans for marketing emergency procedures and training staff, faculty, and students about the emergency plan procedures.

Phase three- response: this phase provides for the immediate protection of life and property, re-establishing control and minimizing the effects of a disaster. It is acting to effectively contain and resolve a crisis. Responses to crisis are enhanced by thorough and effective collaboration and planning during the prevention-mitigation and preparedness phases. During the response phase, it is expected that campus officials activate the emergency management plan. Effective response requires informed decision-making and identification of clear lines of decision authority. Included in this phase is also evacuation and other forms of protective action; mobilization and organization of emergency personnel, volunteers, and material resources; search and rescue; care of casualties and survivors; damage and needs assessment; damage control and restoration of public services; and maintenance of the political and legal system.

Phase four-Recovery: the recovery phase establishes procedures, resources, and policies to assist an institution and its members' return to functioning after an emergency. Recovery is an ongoing process and the goal of this phase is to restore the learning environment. Recovery includes the physical and structural recovery, business recovery, restoration of the academic-learning environment and psychological and emotional recovery (Spellings, Price & Modzeleski, 2009, p. 7-15).

Phase 5-Revision: it involves evaluation of the institution's response to a crisis, determining what it did right and wrong and using this insight to improve the crisis management phases (Coombs, 2015, p. 6). Understanding the crisis management process is important for effective crisis communication during all crisis phases.

#### **Crisis leaders and crisis communication.**

Educational leaders need to become familiar with, study, and understand crisis communication and the impact it has on stakeholders as well as the organization during a crisis (Lawson, 2007; Ulmer et al., 2007). The shock and impact of crises can create intense public interest (Ulmer et al., 2015). In fact, public appetite for information grows exponentially, as both the affected and unaffected populations watch the crisis unfold on television, read about events in the newspaper, or track developments online for extended periods of time (Miller & Goidel 2009; Ulmer et al., 2015). People affected by crisis need information about relief efforts, the scale of destruction, any lingering risks, and explanations for events and how quick response will be. It is required that crisis leaders learn the importance of quick, concise, informative, and factual communication during a crisis to be effective leaders (Lawson, 2007; Lerbinger, 1997). Communication with the news media, social media publics, internal publics, external publics

should begin as soon as possible in the “golden hour,” the first hour following notification that a crisis has occurred (Fearn-Banks, 2016, p. 45).

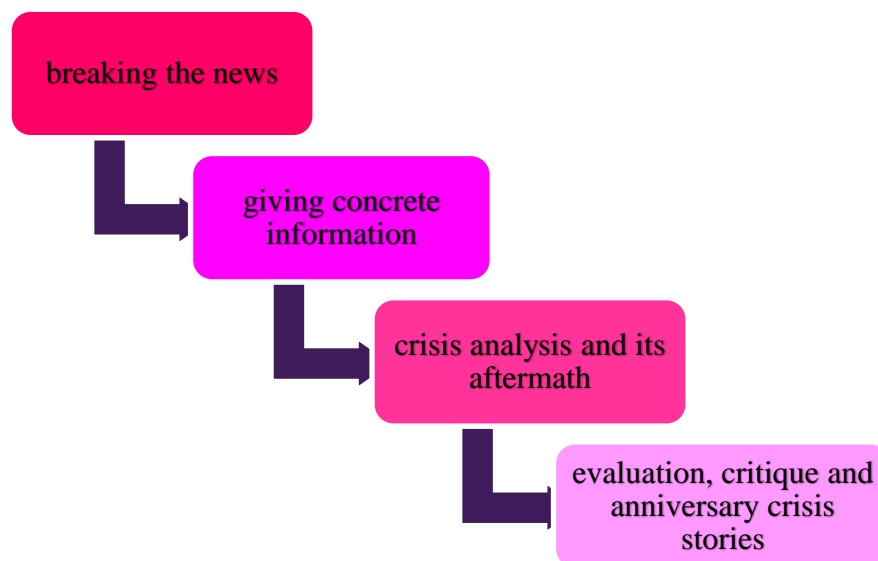
Crisis communications can be defined as the dialog between an organization, the public, government leaders, internal and external stakeholders within the organization, prior to, during, and after a crisis. The dialog details strategies and tactics designed to minimize damage to people, critical infrastructure, and public (Fearn-Banks, 2016). Crisis communication includes those messages that are given to audiences during an emergency event that threatens them either immediately or at some foreseeable point (Walaski, 2011). Effective crisis communications not only can improve the outcomes after a crisis but also can sometimes bring the organization a more positive reputation, therefore, crisis leaders need to understand how to effectively communicate and what communication tools are available to them.

#### **Crisis communication tools.**

The media, both social and traditional, are prominent players who make substantial impact during a crisis and must be targets of communications as swiftly as possible (Fearn-Banks, 2016; Ulmer et al., 2015). Seeger (2006) encouraged forming partnerships with the media as a best practice of crisis leadership. When a crisis occurs, ideally, traditional media should be contacted and at the same time information and updates should be posted on social media because accuracy of information disseminated is necessary. An example of lack of prompt communication occurred during hurricane Katrina, when Mayor Nagin of New Orleans and his staff did not have communication for two days after the storm hit—an extraordinary amount of time in responding to a crisis when people are stranded and dying (Kapucu & Van Wart, 2008).



Garnett and Kouzmin (2007) stated that the role of the media is to disseminate information about the crisis and “frame” the crisis for viewers, listeners, or readers (p. 175). Fearn-Banks (2016) identified four stages of crisis news coverage as: (a) stage one is breaking the news: it is the immediate shocking or dramatic impact when detailed information is usually not available; this stage ends when causes and explanations are presented; (b) stage two begins when concrete details are available; (c) stage three involves analysis of the crisis and its aftermath, questions such as how the victims are coping and what is being done to remedy the situation, more is said about how and why; (d) stage four is the evaluation, critique, and anniversary stories of the crisis (p. 47-48). See Figure 3.



**Figure 3. The four stages of crisis news coverage (Fearn-Banks, 2016).**

Higher education leaders should be aware of the different stages of crisis news coverage and take advantage of the different social media and traditional media as they communicate strategically with both the internal stakeholders and the public. Social media resources such as

twitter, Facebook, YouTube, instant messaging, Instagram and WhatsApp, blogs and wikis address the void for information during crisis. An example of such usage was during the tornadoes in Joplin Missouri and hurricane Sandy (Ulmer et al., 2015). Coombs (2015) encouraged leaders to use social media communications and argued for four basic rules in using social media: be present, be where the action is, be there before the action and be polite.

### **Reputational risk in higher education.**

Despite their core educational missions, colleges and universities are really like cities in terms of the services they must provide and even some of the businesses they are in (Mitroff, Diamond & Alpaslan, 2006). This means that they may be liable to all the risks found in a city and one of such risks is reputational risk. Reputational risk is a top risk for colleges and universities due to its increasing likelihood, quickness to spread, and the high impact such a risk can have on an institution (ERM Initiative Faculty & Baker, 2019). Coombs and Holladay (2006) defined a reputation as an evaluation a stakeholder makes about an organization. According to Beasley (2013), reputation is a major driver of value for a university, and anything that paints an institution's reputation in a bad light is a ding in that asset. Therefore, managing reputational risk has both advantages and disadvantages (ERM Initiative Faculty & Baker, 2019). The advantage of managing reputational risk is that it leads to a high performing institution, while the disadvantages are decreased state funding, decreased contributions, significant drops in the number and types of new student applications, disenfranchised alumni, accreditation problems, and key employee turnover (ERM Initiative Faculty & Baker, 2019). Therefore, an institution's reputation requires careful and constant protection (Porter, 2013). A university's reputation develops through the information stakeholders receive about the organization (Fombrun & van

Riel, 2004). Stakeholders receive information through interactions with an organization, mediated reports about an organization (including the news media and advertising) and second-hand information from other people (e.g., word of mouth and weblogs) (Carroll, 2004; Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Meijer, 2004). Because reputations are evaluative, some point of comparison is required. Stakeholders compare what they know about an organization to some standard to determine whether an organization meets their expectations for how an organization should behave.

When managing reputational risks, literature suggests using the Enterprise risk management framework (which is the process of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling the activities of an organization) especially for the governance and culture aspects of a university (Abraham & Walker, 2013; Beasley, 2013; Porter, 2013; ERM Initiative Faculty & Baker, 2019). In order to successfully manage their reputational risks, higher education institutions are encouraged to build their governance and culture to set the tone, engage leaders in risk management, enforce accountability, and demonstrate desired behaviors surrounding reputational risk (Abraham & Walker, 2013). Examples of best practices for risk management in higher education include developing a common understanding of the institution's reputation through a deep dive and surveys of constituents, students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community members; assessing and striving to steadily improve the culture of the institution and other factors that significantly contribute to the institution's reputation; and identify ownership and lines of communication for specific reputational risks (Abraham & Walker, 2013). Identifying, assessing, and managing reputational risks can help ensure that when reputational risk events occur, the impact is less devastating (ERM Initiative Faculty & Baker, 2019).

## **Internally Displaced People as a Result of Crisis (IDP)**

Internally displaced people are forced to flee their home but never cross an international border. These individuals seek safety anywhere they can find it—in nearby towns, schools, settlements, internal camps, even forests and fields. IDPs include people displaced by internal strife and natural disasters (United Nations Refugee Agency, 2018). For every person internally displaced during a crisis there is a story. Each year hundreds of thousands of people in different corners of the world are forced from the safety of their homes and compelled to take flight because of crises (Hampton, 2014). While some people may find shelter with friends and family, the majority of those affected by crises may not find shelter, food, and clothing. These people who are forced to take flight from their homes within the boundaries of their countries are generally referred to as internal displaced people (Bile, Shadoul, Raaijmakers & Shabib, 2010; Hampton, 2014; Segal & Elliott, 2014).

Internally displaced persons remain the most vulnerable of groups – uprooted, dispossessed, traumatized, and often forgotten or neglected (Egeland, 2005). Responding to the needs of internally displaced people, such as directing them to safe meeting locations, providing access to necessary support, help navigating the complexity of support networks, food and housing supply, is the collective and collaborative responsibility of government officials with support from emergency planners, and leaders (Anand, 2014; Egeland, 2005; Marlowe, 2013; Patton, 2007). Clear operational accountability, leadership and coordination is required as collaborative contingency plans are created to ensure multiple ways of responding to the IDP (Egeland, 2005; Marlowe, 2013). Higher Education crisis leaders are expected to identify ways to support local community responses as IDP are identified (Marlowe, 2013). Effectiveness of

response and evacuation is an integral part of crisis response and should be included in all crisis response plans.

### **Support for Crisis Leaders**

Mental health for crisis leaders is an important aspect of how leaders respond to crisis. Cornell and Sheras (1998) encouraged crisis leaders to have a good understanding of their own involvement in such an emotionally charged event. The potential for negative emotional consequence, resulting from exposures to traumatic events, high levels of work demand, work with disrupted communities and evacuee populations (Benedek, Fullerton, & Ursano 2007) is high. A study by Fullerton, Ursano, and Wang (2004) revealed that more exposed [leaders], were seeking medical care for emotional problems following a crisis. Benedek, et al. (2007) recommended an early intervention of support for crisis leaders called psychological first aid. Psychological first aid includes components such as facilitation of social connectedness, fostering optimism, decreasing arousal, and restoring a sense of self-efficacy through psychoeducation, basic relaxation training, and cognitive reframing (Benedek, et al., 2007).

In another study by Fein (2001), he found that leaders sought and received support from other sources such as family members, peers and co-workers and mental health professionals. Cornell and Sheras (1998) suggested professional consultation and peer supervision as useful means of support and clarification for crisis leaders especially after tragic events. Prati and Pietrantonio (2010) advised a social support structure which might influence emotional states and provide help in identifying adaptive coping strategies. In addition, Lepore (2001) proposed that the nature and quality of social interactions may provide opportunities to gather information useful for the assimilation of trauma (e.g., through advice, new perspectives or alternative

interpretations) and influence the frequency of intrusive thoughts, and the tendency to avoid disclosing of feelings, or thinking about the event. Crisis training for higher education leaders is another way to provide support for crisis leaders. Fein and Isaacson (2009) believed that a more systemic type of support for crisis leaders would be the assessment, clarification, and implementation of structures of shared leadership, which hold the possibility of easing the burden of the post-crisis human toll, among other goals.

### **Call to Action**

Although crisis leadership research has been circulating for over 40 years, there is still much to learn about higher education crisis leadership processes. Educational leaders are faced with more complex and challenging circumstances than at any other times in our history and the reality is that educational institutions are not immune. This reality has reinforced the need to revisit crisis-management plans, communication strategies during crisis, effective crisis leadership and crisis leadership competencies to determine if a new model is necessary to evolve the system of higher education crisis management into a more applicable context.

### **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

The phenomenon of the study was addressed by using a qualitative research methodology. The participants in this study included senior leaders in a higher education institution, a member of the emergency operations group, an elementary school vice-principal and the city's emergency management agency. These groups of people were involved in the evacuation, emergency response, media, and communication in a city in western Canada. The aim of the study was to examine how higher education leaders responded to human-made and natural crises. Purposeful and snowball sampling technique were used in conjunction with face-to-face semi-structured interviews, field texts, and documents. In this chapter, I begin with a description of the theoretical assumptions surrounding qualitative research and the narrative inquiry, in addition to how these influence the conceptualization of the study. I review the research questions, the research design, ethical considerations, data collection, and researcher assumptions. Afterward, I cover thematic analysis and lastly verification process, member checking and rich thick descriptions.

#### **Qualitative Research**

A research question that asks “what” or “how” and looks to words for answers rather than numbers, is a qualitative research study (Creswell, 1994). This type of research is best suited for use when variables are unknown, and exploration is desired in research (Creswell, 2015). Furthermore, qualitative research seeks to explore, explain, and describe a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). In addition, qualitative research is naturalistic and interpretive in approach. It is an attempt to make meaning or sense of the phenomenon through the study of the participants in their natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Merriam (2009) explained that

qualitative research seeks to understand, discover, and its findings are comprehensive, holistic, and richly descriptive. In addition to the above, qualitative research can also provide advantages relative to framing subjective perceptions that might be non-quantifiable, identify the subjective reality experienced by participants in the study, and generate results that are understandable and experientially credible (Fleming, 2004). A qualitative approach helps to avoid reducing a complex, personal story to statistical definitions and categories, and emphasizes a rich and complex exploration of the experiences of a small number of individuals (Paljakka, 2008).

This study employed a qualitative research approach to understand, make meaning and interpret the phenomenon of how higher education leaders responded to natural and human-made crises. To get a better and deeper understanding of the subject matter, I utilized a narrative inquiry approach to develop a deep, holistic, rich, and detailed understanding of the lived experiences of higher education leaders' response to natural and human-made crises.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative is the primary mode of human knowing, offering a seemingly effortless way for the mind to intrinsically code human actions, concerns, and values (Willig & Rogers, 2017). Narratives have been widely studied as windows into the analysis of human communities and individuals in fields as diverse as anthropology (Lévi & Strauss, 1963), ethnography and folklore (Bauman, 1986; Hymes, 1981; Rosaldo, 1986), social history (Griffin, 1993), psychology (Bruner, 1990; Mishler, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992) and sociology (Somers & Gibson, 1994). In addition, narratives have also been used as data in many fields of the social sciences (De Fina, 2003).



Narrative inquiry as defined by Chase (1995) is “meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one’s own or others’ actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time” (p. 421). Connelly et al. (1990) describe narrative inquiry as the study of ways humans experience the world, with a focus on the experience and the qualities of life and education. In expressing our experiences, we tell stories, thereby shaping our daily lives by making meaningful, personal interpretation of these stories (Connelly et al., 2006). The central concept of narrative inquiry is that humans are storytelling beings, who, individually and socially, lead storied lives and narrative researchers aim to describe these lives, by collecting, and telling stories of them, and writing narratives of experience (Connelly et al., 1990). Narrative inquiry is both a phenomenon and a research methodology.

As a phenomenon, narrative inquiry is the study of experience as story and is primarily a way of thinking about experience. As a research methodology, it entails creating a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a view of experience as the phenomenon under study (Connelly et al., 2006). Narrative inquiry has the capacity to recognize people’s strengths, engage people in active, meaning-making dialogues and employ methods that allow for thick or rich descriptions that can result in an account that focuses on the personal meaning of the participants (Denzin et al., 2011; Fraser, 2004).

In the context of this study, the use of narratives provides an opportunity to describe, using thick rich descriptions, the lived experiences of higher education crises leaders, obtain inspiration from them and resonate with the lives of others. These narratives can also link people together through a shared history, provide psychological healing and the discovery of new values

as life's experiences are exposed and meaning recovered (Fraser, 2004). Further, narratives invite us as listeners, readers and viewers to enter the perspective of higher education crises leaders (Riessman, 2008).

### **Researcher Assumptions**

Qualitative research emphasizes the quality of entities, processes, and meanings. It stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher, what and who is studied and the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Denzin et al., 2011).

As a researcher, I seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. In seeking answers, I realize that “reality can never be fully comprehended, only approximated” (Guba, 1990, p. 22). Therein lies my “worldview” or paradigm (Creswell, 2015, p. 482). A paradigm is defined as a “basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). The foundational lens, which researchers use to interact with the world around them. Guba (1990) saw paradigms as the net that contained the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises. Generally, the research paradigm impacts the span of all decisions made – from broad assumptions to details such as data collection and analysis (Mason, 2013). My paradigm significantly shapes how I see the world and act in it.

I approached this study from an interpretive paradigm as I attempted to interpret and make sense of how others viewed the world (Creswell, 2009). I recognize that as a researcher, I am part of the research when I study social phenomenon because of my predisposed ontological, epistemological, and methodological beliefs. I therefore make my beliefs explicit. My ontological beliefs are based on my subjective view of reality within an interpretivist paradigm.

My epistemological assumption was that studying participants in their natural settings and including participants with different perspectives on a shared experience in an inquiry will provide a means of constructing knowledge and informing a deeper understanding of the phenomena. Methodologically, I believe a holistic examination through narratives provides a rich understanding of the phenomena within real-life context. Data collection was in the form of semi-structured interviews, field notes of shared experience, and documents sought in the online space. These different sources of information produced a “rich data source with a focus on concrete particularities of life that created a powerful narrative” (Connelly et al., 1990, p. 5).

### **Research Design and Methods**

Narrative inquirers organize their work by intruding, respectfully, on people in the course of living real lives, and requesting their stories, in hopes that these stories will give insights and/or contribute to the understanding about the different facets of human knowledge (Josselson, 2007). This narrative inquiry explored how higher education leaders responded to natural and human-made crises. As a result, the main method for data collection was face-to-face semi-structured interviews, field texts, and documents. Demographic information of participants was collected at the interview stage. The demographic information included the participant’s formal leadership role within the organization, a description of the current role, and the person’s role in the crisis management team.

#### **Research study participants.**

The sample population for this research study were senior leaders in a higher education crisis management team, a member of the emergency operations group, an elementary school vice-principal and the city’s emergency management agency. These groups of people were

involved in the evacuation, emergency response, media, and communication in a city in western Canada. The elementary school vice-principal and the city's emergency management agency were included as research participants because of the collaborations and partnerships with the educational institution studied in responding to all three crises. The rationale for selecting these leaders was based on their role as key stakeholders in decision making and disaster response. Participants were selected based on their positions and their active involvement in the crisis management team, and in certain internal processes; such as preparation and planning. The participants are considered experts in their field and had prior experiences in handling different forms of crises. Thirteen participants were approached for this study through emails and face-to-face communication. Eleven participants were available and willing to participate, and an interview was scheduled with a potential participant but due to work and family obligations the interview was cancelled. One potential participant did not respond.

Out of the eleven participants interviewed, eight were senior administrators in the university comprising of one provost/vice president academic, one vice provost, one associate vice president, and five vice presidents handling different portfolios. For the other three participants, one is a member of the emergency operations group, one is a vice principal in an elementary school, and one is a member of the city's emergency management agency. Working with a population of participants in high-profile campus positions carried many of the properties of elite interviews (Kezar, 2008; Odendahl & Shaw, 2001). Leaders often have limited time for interviews; therefore, it was critical to provide information to their staff up front, so the participants could be briefed on the study and interview questions were sent ahead of interview

schedule (Kezar, 2008). At eleven interviews, I decided that my data was at saturation point because no new or fresh data sparked new insights (Creswell, 2014).

### **Participant sample.**

A sampling frame, or target population, is a group of individuals who share common characteristics that the researcher can identify and study (Creswell, 2014). Participant recruitment for this research was through purposeful sampling and the use of snowball sampling technique or chain-referral-sampling (Etikan, Alkassim & Abubakar, 2017; Sadler, Lee, Lim & Fullerton, 2010). Snowball is a technique that can help identify populations or participants that may be hidden or hard to reach (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Though this sampling method generates biased samples, because it is not random, it however, selects individuals based on social networks (Baxter & Eyles 1997; Faugier & Sargeant, 1997). Two participants with a great number of social networks provided the researcher with a higher proportion of other respondents with characteristics similar to the initial respondent (Erickson, 1979), making it possible for the researcher to include people in the investigation that she would not have known to include, otherwise. To address the issue of biased samples, Morgan (2008) suggested that researchers begin with a set of initial informants that are as diverse as possible. In this study, my participants as members of a crisis management team, had diverse backgrounds and experiences in handling crises and different job portfolios.

In keeping with the technique of snowballing, an initial contact or gate-keeper was approached, who then referred the researcher to other potential participants. The selection of the gatekeeper was based on criteria that was specific to the research study. Care was taken to allow for confidentiality, so the gate keeper had no knowledge of who took part in the interview

process. Participants were then asked to suggest other participants who shared specific attributes or qualities that were being studied (Wilson, 2008).

## **Data Collection Methods**

### **The interviews.**

Seidman (2006) indicated that it is of vital interest to the researcher to understand through the interview the lived experience of the participant and the meaning they attribute to that experience. As a method of inquiry, Seidman (2006) suggested that “interviewing is most consistent with people’s ability to make meaning through language” (p. 14). Creswell (2015) recommended using open-ended questions enabling participants to voice their experiences unconstrained by the researcher perspective. Geanellos (1999) observed that an unskilled or beginning researcher may have challenges with open-ended interviews that can result in poor data or awkward interviews. I choose to use a semi-structured interview format, thereby, allowing me to work through a checklist of open-ended questions, which ensured uniformity, consistency and the opportunity to delve deeper; while allowing the participants to build from the questions and take the interview into new or unscripted directions. In addition, given each participant’s involvement in the crisis management process, it was important to give time for meaningful and deliberately focused conversations in the interviews to gather their knowledge and experiences, while prompting discussion around topics of the phenomena to generate rich descriptions (Shaw, 2017; Van Manen, 2014).

In accordance with Creswell’s (2015) interview guidelines on identifying suitable interview locations, all interview times and venues were chosen to meet the schedules of the participants, which made some of the interviews time-limited. Semi-structured interviews lasted

an average of 1hour 20minutes. For use at the beginning of each interview, I had established an observational protocol for recording information, reviewing the informed consent form with the participants and allowing participants time to read the form and ask questions (Creswell, 2015). Participants signed the consent form that explained the purpose of the study, their involvement and role, their consent to be audio recorded, and their rights to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Participants were informed that interviews would be audio-taped and later transcribed for analysis. I openly discussed my background and interest in the topic with all participants before conducting the interviews with the intent of establishing rapport and creating an atmosphere of openness, and trustworthiness (Fontana & Frey, 2000). I used probes to seek more information (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Some examples of probing questions included: “Tell me about your role...”, Can you tell me about any experiences...” and “How did the university...” (Riessman, 2008, p. 25). There were shifts in topics and since one story led to another, and stories were interconnected, I adopted Riessman’s (2008) recommendation and explored the meanings and associations that connected stories. All interviews were audio-recorded, and I later transcribed them for analysis. After transcribing all eleven interviews, I sent the transcribed data to participants for review, accuracy, feedback and an offered an opportunity to change any information they wished altered. All participants reviewed the transcribed data for accuracy and two participants made minor edits to their transcripts.

The process of personally transcribing all the interviews, gave me the opportunity to acquire a sense of intimacy with my participants, as well as know when I had reached saturation through the common themes that emerged from the interviews. During the transcribing, I

observed groups of similar concepts appearing in the form of similar answers. Once the data was in the form of field texts, I decided to start ‘reading between the lines’ to decode the field texts obtained according to an interpretive process that took me through a thematic analysis of my participant’s stories in order to describe and reflect their individual circumstances and perceptions. Through this type of analysis, several patterns and themes began to emerge.

### **Field texts.**

Connelly et al. (1990) identified field text as one of the primary tools in data collection in a narrative inquiry. This is collected through participant observation in a shared and practical setting. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) noted that the field text enables one to think narratively, crafting the research text with careful attention to the narrative inquiry commonplaces. Field texts taken during the interviews contained my detailed reflections during the data collection, analysis, and description (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Connelly et al., 2011; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). My field texts included my notes taken during the interviews to help formulate questions as the interviews progressed. The field texts enabled me to highlight early insights that were relevant to pursue and indicated areas that required clarification or probing as participants were responding (Patton, 2002; Nanji, 2015). In addition, I made summaries of participants answers to questions asked as I compared their points of view during my analysis.

My field text consisted of a coil note scribbler, password protected files on my laptop (to collect emails and other digital files), and Microsoft document (for research reflections, and jottings) (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). My coil note scribbler provided a critical source of transparency of my study, and acted as a decision trail for my observations, reflections, and thoughts (Laverly, 2003).



## **Documents.**

Documents are a valuable source of information. Creswell (2015) explained that documents could be public and private records and can include journals, minutes of meetings, evaluations, etc. I could not get private documents that explained the institutions learnings during the crisis responses. However, I sourced public documents in the online space, from publicly available media reports (newspapers, T.V) regarding the institution's response to crises. During my analysis, these public documents served as a source to corroborate and augment accounts collected from institutional stakeholders.

## **The Research Question**

How did senior leaders in a large western Canadian higher education institution respond to unpredictable human-made and natural crises?

## **The interview questions.**

The following sample questions guided my investigation into the phenomena of higher education leaders' lived experiences with responding to crises (see appendix 1 for the complete list of interview questions):

1. What is your formal leadership role, and can you describe what it entails?
2. Tell me about your role in the crisis management team.
3. Can you tell me about any experiences in handling any type of crises?
4. Can you describe the competencies of what you believe to be an effective crises leader? Can you tell me how you did or did not demonstrate these leadership competencies during a crisis?
5. When you first heard about the flood, what was your initial reaction?

6. When did you know you were to take in evacuees from the flood? What were your thoughts, your initial response, and your feelings?
7. Does the university have emergency procedures in place for handling crises? If so, tell me about these procedures, what procedures did you find to be inadequate and what procedures were subsequently put in place for future possibilities?
8. Can you tell me about the collaboration between the university and the elementary School in settling evacuees' children in the elementary school?
9. Can you tell me about the collaboration between the university and the city of in settling evacuees?
10. Do you think that these crises were effectively handled? Why? What would you have done differently?

### **Data Analysis**

The semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. In discussing narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlighted a three-dimensional space of temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). To research an experience means to do so in all three dimensions simultaneously and in ways they intersect. Temporality of experience acknowledges that past experiences lead to other experiences, which in turn become part of future ones (Nanji, 2015). Thus, narratives unfold over time concerning itself with personal and social conditions. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) defined personal as “feelings, hopes desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions of the person” (p. 480) and the social as “existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people” (p. 480) and the relationship between the participants and the inquirer. This study

transitions between the past, present and future, acknowledging the dependence of time and the incessant ways in which experiences occur in specific boundaries of concrete and physical places.

As I transitioned from field text to research texts, I experienced a tension about leaving the field and wondered what to do with the masses of field texts I had obtained during data collection. I was careful to give consideration to the kind of research text I intended to write (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I struggled with the tension of an invasion of reductionistic terms in the writing of my inquiry, whether to write a research text with individual chapters devoted to minibiographies of participants or look at common threads and elements across participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I read other writers' account and theses to open my mind to different possibilities and help address my tensions (Davalos, 2016; Fein, 2001; Grant, 2017; Ko, 2014; Muffet-Willett, 2010; Nanji, 2015). I remained aware that the purpose of narrative inquiry was to study lived and told stories that are very particular in nature. Therefore, the need to be mindful of creating a balance in the tensions of writing within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, and of writing in ways that narratively capture the field experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I recalled Clandinin and Connelly (2000) metaphor on creating rich "steamy soup with different ingredients in the narrative pot" as a representation of the different parts of a narrative text (p. 155). I decided to write parts of my texts as richly textured narrative descriptions of people situated in place and time and other parts composed of thematic analysis of their experiences. Creswell (2015) noted that the identification of themes provides the complexity of a story and adds depth to the insight about understanding how higher education leaders in a large western university responded to crises. In doing this, I followed aspects of the

reductionist framework as well as incorporated the formalistic approach to understand if these themes fit into specific categories, such as crisis leaders' competences, and self-care after handling a crisis.

Another tension I faced was the “sense of tentativeness” expressed as a kind of uncertainty. Clandinin, Connelly and Chan (2002) found in their experiences with doctoral students learning to do narrative inquiry, a sense of uncertainty due to the distinctive nature of each inquiry and each specific participant in an inquiry (p. 31). Yet, I continuously reminded myself of the value of doing “one’s best” as I stayed committed to a nuanced understanding of the experiences of different research participants and knowing other comprehensive uncovering as it relates to the three-dimensional space was possible.

#### **Ethical considerations.**

As a researcher, a moral responsibility binds me to conduct ethically sound research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). I sought and received ethics approval from the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board of the University and followed the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2010). I had an initial meeting with the gate keeper to talk about my study and to find out if I could have access to the crisis management team. I then contacted the gate keeper by email to set up a meeting, I sent the consent form and interview questions ahead. Through the snowballing process, I sent emails to identified leaders to explain the purpose of the study and seek their consent to be participants in the research. After agreeing to participate in the study, and due to the elite nature of ten of the participants, it was critical to provide informed consent forms and the interview questions ahead of the scheduled

interview to their staff up front, so that the participants could be briefed on the study and allow for time to read through and ask questions (Kezar, 2008).

Interview dates and times were scheduled with all participants at a location convenient to them. Ten interviews were held in the privacy of participant's offices, while one interview was at a coffee shop. Participants signed the informed consent forms prior to the beginning of each interview, these forms contained information on steps to safeguard their privacy, and confidentiality, the purpose, and design of the research study. Participants were assured of fair treatment and confidentiality in the data collection and analysis process. Simons (2009) stated that offering confidentiality encourages participants to speak more openly and honestly. It also assured them that any information they revealed, which may be sensitive, personal, or problematic, will be handled respectfully and will not be exposed. It was important to use pseudonyms "changing participant and institutional names" to protect their identity (Simons, 2009, p. 113).

Interviews were conducted from a deeply human, genuine, empathic, and respectful relationship to the participant about significant and meaningful aspects of the participant's life during crises response (Clandinin, 2013; Josselson, 2012). Relational ethics formed the core of this inquiry, and I established a research relationship with the participants respecting their dignity, integrity, confidentiality, and protecting their identities. The ethics of care, and the prominence of living alongside participants in the living and telling of their stories made it imperative for care and sensitivity to be present throughout the process of data collection as participants recalled sensitive and emotional stories of crises responses (Morris 2013; Noddings 2003). Consequently, it was important to be attentive to ending the narrative conversations in a

positive and less emotional note, so participants may feel cared for and their feelings and voices mattered (Josselson, 2007; Ko, 2014). In lieu of this, my interactions with my participants involved regular check-ins to ensure they felt comfortable, were not fatigued, and if they needed a break from the conversation, I was willing to stop. In addition, all participants were given control over what information they wanted to share and were asked to read and review the transcribed interview for accuracy and change any information they wished to have altered before they become public. This process was a useful opportunity to member check or verify information ensuring that nothing said by the participant was taken out of context and that no harm was caused as a result.

In addition, documents obtained in the online space from webpages, newspapers and T.V stations was included as an additional source for data verification. Stories shared by participants through the interviews were securely pass-word protected on my home computer and other materials were kept locked in a secure place available only to me and my supervisor to ensure confidentiality. In addition, participants knew that they could choose the depth of information shared and they had the choice to refrain from answering any questions with which they were uncomfortable or even withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

#### **Verification process.**

Data analysis for the study required attention to common uncertainties, which underscored the acceptability of the research inquiry, such as transferability, dependability, and credibility (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). These issues are key for discussing the trustworthiness of the research. However, Connelly et al. (1990) advocated that narratives relies on criteria other than validity, reliability and generalizability and encouraged that the language for narrative

criteria not be squeezed into a language created for other forms of research. They further emphasized that the language and criteria for the conduct of a narrative inquiry was under development in the research community (Connelly et al., 1990). They identified apperency (the quality of being apparent or clearly visible), verisimilitude, and transferability as possible criteria (Connelly et al., 1990). In the same fashion, Fraser (2004) pointed out that issues of trustworthiness in narrative analysis should not be governed by formulas or recipes, such as generalizations and validity. To establish the credibility and trustworthiness of this study, Creswell's (2014) recommendation of having one or more strategies of verification was used. These strategies are member checking, and the use of thick, rich description. Patton (1980) noted that the trustworthiness of the data is tied directly to the trustworthiness of the evaluator who collects and analyzes the data. The researcher was diligent to ensure the credibility of the data throughout the processes of data collection and analysis.

### **Member checking.**

According to Creswell (2014) member checking is a process whereby a researcher asks participants to verify the accuracy of the final report or specific descriptions or themes of the qualitative findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) encouraged that member checking should be considered "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Participants were given the opportunity to review for accuracy, give feedback and change any information they wished altered in the transcribed data, in addition to reviewing the draft of the researcher's report. All participants reviewed the transcribed data for accuracy and two participants made minor edits to their transcripts.

### **Rich, thick descriptions.**

Creswell (2014) encouraged providing detailed rich, thick descriptions to convey the findings of the research and make it become more realistic and richer. These detailed rich, thick descriptions may transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experience (Creswell, 2014). The goal of rich description is to create verisimilitude or a sense that the reader has experienced or could experience the events as described in the report (Creswell, 2014). All written analysis produced corresponded to the stories told, as well as to the objectives of the research. Furthermore, I did not use software in this thesis work, instead used field texts, and returned to my participants to authenticate their stories and themes. I transcribed all the data myself, which gave me the opportunity to build a deep contextual understanding of all stories and become immersed and acquire a sense of intimacy with my participants.

### **Chapter Summary**

This third chapter focused on the description of a qualitative research approach using a narrative inquiry methodology into the study of how senior leaders in a large western Canadian university responded to human-made and natural crisis. I discussed the considerations and characteristics of the research methods, and methodology of the approach, as well as the justification for the choice of narrative inquiry as an appropriate methodology. I made explicit my ontological and epistemological assumptions, the research design and methods. I laid out the research participants and the sample selection criteria and considerations. In addition, I stated the ethical considerations that guided the interactions with interview candidates. The data collection strategy was the use of semi-structured interviews of selected key participants involved in the higher education crisis leadership system, field texts and documents. Ethics board protocols were



followed and the process of data analysis, verification, member checking and rich, thick descriptions to handle the issues of credibility and trustworthiness. The considerations about potential shortcomings or downfalls of the methods were reviewed and addressed. The study is both timely and relevant, as it addresses the current issue of crisis management and leadership facing higher education leaders across Canada and the United States.

## **Chapter Four: The Narrative**

In this chapter, eleven individuals who identify themselves as part of a crisis management team/agency were interviewed. Eight participants in one western university were in the crisis management team at senior administrators' level of Provost/Vice-president academic, one Vice Provost, one associate Vice-president, and five Vice-presidents of different portfolios. One participant is a dedicated, full time campus emergency manager, another participant is a vice principal in an elementary school and one participant is the deputy chief of city's crisis management agency. Semi-structured interviews were an average of one-hour and twenty minutes. Each of the participants is introduced to the reader through their profiles and substantial portions of the interview text are presented. The purpose is for the reader to become immersed in the stories of the leaders. Something to note is that some participants accounts are shorter than others because they responded to either one or two crises situations.

### **Thematic Analysis**

I did not use software to analyze or transcribe this thesis work. I transcribed all audiotaped interviews myself. I sent the transcribed interviews to the participants by email to give them an opportunity to authenticate their stories and themes. I choose to transcribe the interviews personally, because I wanted to acquire a sense of intimacy with my participants, thus giving me the opportunity to build deep contextual understanding of all stories and become immersed in the data. Transcribing myself also gave me the opportunity to know when I had reached saturation through the common themes that emerged from the interviews. Reaching data saturation in a qualitative study helps the researcher know when to stop carrying out interviews. When saturation takes place, data obtained is not novel in substance anymore but only results in

variations on already existing themes (Davalos, 2016). At this stage, a reliable sense of thematic exhaustion and variability takes place. I experienced the sense of thematic exhaustion and data saturation by the time I had conducted and analyzed my eleventh interview. From the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> interviews no new themes or ideas appeared, nothing new was being said by the participants.

Below are excerpts from the eleven interviews I conducted. Each of the eleven participants bring their area of expertise to the crisis management team.

### **Participant #1 Esther**

Esther was my gate keeper and initial contact, she is the Provost and vice president academic of a large research university and has a very tight and busy schedule. In her office, you get a sense of a leader with authority, compassion, calm, dedication to her job, her staff, the university and the students. Esther describes her role as two separate jobs, “the provost is the chief operating officer of the university and the vice president is the chief academic officer. A very broad portfolio with deep responsibilities.” In addition, she is the team lead of the crisis management team with a “fairly mature crises management process.” She explains that there are three crises teams at the university; the first responders, the emergency operation group and the crisis management team comprised of herself, the other vice-presidents and the general counsel.

#### **Esther and prior crisis experiences.**

Esther talked about some of her prior experiences in handling crises before becoming the crisis management team lead. She recalled some crisis situations she handled as the deputy crisis lead at another university:

I recall reputational issues at the institution ... a suicide done by hydrogen and sulfide gas that created an issue across campus where we had to evacuate. We've done lots of

tabletop exercises with our team, I think that its a really important part of making sure that crises management teams are ready to operate, that they've had practice rounds.

Esther didn't elaborate on these crises. She goes on to explain what tabletop exercises were and its importance:

Tabletop exercises are practice exercises. We have had an external group come in and create the crisis or you could do a crisis in theory and have teams of people that tell you every minute or two, what's happening, and you have to react to it. We always said practice makes perfect, right, unless you've practiced in those situations you don't really know how you are going to respond. I was very fortunate in my previous institutions, we did table top exercises every four months and I understand the value of those exercises. When I arrived here, those were not being done and so we created the opportunity. We've done an active shooter scenario, we've done I think a bomb or explosion, ... they created a fire in two or three different labs at the same time. There's been a series of things we've done to help practice.

Esther says convincingly that the value of tabletop exercises can not be underestimated.

These tabletops exercises provide opportunities for leaders to practice for crises response under a low stress environment and enable leaders to evaluate their state of readiness for crisis management. It is important she argues to constantly practice different real-world scenarios, this allows leaders to test their established plans and their ability to respond to unanticipated events.

### **Esther and competencies of a crisis leader.**

When asked to describe the competencies of what she considers to be an effective crises leader, Esther took a deep pause to reflect on the question, giving the response in a thoughtful contemplative manner:

You have to have a sense of calm, be able to see the big picture, but you can't be afraid to make decisions, be able to make the call, because you have information coming at you from all corners and you have to know what information you need in order to make the decision. A part of being an effective leader of a crisis management team is understanding what information you have and what information you don't have. What information you need to get to make timely decisions. Crises management leadership is by its nature command and control for much of it. You might be able to have some conversation where

a variety of issues may surface with the team but in the end ... you are going to make a decision, because you don't have time, many times, to sit and wait.

She elaborated further, discussing the need for data-informed decisions and the necessity for people to take care of themselves during a lengthy crisis period:

The ability to make decisions with data is really important, keep a cool head, make sure that people are responding to you, and that people are taking care of themselves, because a crisis can go on for a period. We've had different crises that are short in nature and then crises that went on for many days. You can't be meeting 24 hours a day, you've got to make sure people are taking time off, that in between those times off, they are getting sleep, they are getting what needs to happen to happen.

In describing how she demonstrated these leadership competencies during a crisis. Esther answered this question from the lens of the university's reputation and the lessons learned from different crises situations:

I would say ... the university gained reputation in the way we handled the three crises. We were very good in the first 24 hours on all three crises, which is an important thing to do ... we were very fortunate we had had some table top exercises in advance. It was interesting though ... we learned some lessons in all of them. An important part of any crises is the debriefing, to see what went well and what didn't go well. Having tabletop exercises were quite instructive, because we had done a shooter, the death of a person on campus who was from out of town ... and because two of the crises were back to back [the flood and stabbings] ... we knew right away what we needed to do with some of the students. Therefore, I say, when you set up table top exercises, our team did an excellent job of setting those up in risk management, the lessons we learned from doing those table top exercises, we applied immediately to the situation.

In a crisis, Esther argues, leadership competencies can help organizations effectively and efficiently resolve crisis. Crisis leadership competencies according to her include a sense of calm, quick information processing abilities, timely decision making based on informed data. One of the ways a university can mitigate risk and gain reputation during a crisis, she suggests is to respond within the first twenty-four hours.

### **Esther and the crisis of the flood.**

In the next sections, Esther talked about three major crises of the flood, fire and murders that affected the university. Though these three crises were not on campus, the university was deeply involved in all three: taking in evacuees, providing food, and creating a welcoming atmosphere for the victims and families. Esther was very forthcoming and frank about her initial reactions, how these crises were handled, discussing areas that needed improvements and the learnings that occurred. Her initial reaction during the flood was as follows:

I went home that night across the bridge, and I thought, oh, the water is very high. One of the vice presidents in the university at that time, called me late at night, to say, “we have a problem and we probably need to close campus.”

The university had never been closed for a long period of time, until the flood. Closing the university demanded tackling logistical problems that had not been experienced before. This was new terrain for Esther and the crisis management team, especially since the crisis management team had to manage the crisis from different locations and through phone conversations. Reading the team’s visual cues proved to be a challenge. Esther was open about the challenges they faced and strategies they employed:

I ran the university from my house because I couldn’t get to the university ... all our crisis management was done on the phone, because people were in different locations. It was very interesting, because normally in a room you have a lot of visual cues. ... We were not able to read people’s visual cues, we couldn’t do that on the phone, yet we were able to decide what the critical matters were ... should we shut down the university? What events were occurring on campus that will be impacted by that? There were three conferences, we were hosting, and all were international in nature, that had been in the planning stages for years. What alternate arrangement could be made for those? What other events were happening that we didn’t know about? ... That was one of the issues we identified because we didn’t have a centralized booking system. We were able to cobble together what events were happening and then we had to let people know they were being cancelled and of course people were very unhappy. ... When we were on the phone, we had to be very good at clearly communicating with each other what we were thinking. That meant I had to be clear as the chair and ... be super clear on communication with

other groups as to why events were being cancelled, why we were closing and what the issues were with cancelling. ... Some events were relocated, others were rescheduled, and a couple got canceled.

Esther described the flood as being everyone's crisis not just the city but the university's as well. The university was called upon to host evacuees from the flood; unfortunately, campus residences are designed for student occupation and not intended to host evacuees. To accept evacuees into these residences, several factors needed to be taken into consideration as Esther pointed out:

... how many vacancies do we have in residence? When are students leaving? What spots does that open up in the residence? How many evacuees are coming in? Is there any sort of flexibility in there? How are we managing the inflow of evacuees? All of these were carefully crafted in terms of the numbers that we could take.

Esther further discussed the issues the university faced when they took in evacuees and the interdisciplinary partnerships that ensured:

The flood was not just the university's emergency, it was the city's emergency, as well. In a city emergency, we must work very closely with our counterparts in the city, who are running their crises management and emergence operation group. There is always communication between these groups continually, in terms of, what we are doing. They wanted to relocate people from the flood into our residence, that was an interesting opportunity. ... We got a lot of the inner-city people, who were dislocated and a lot of the inner-city problems as a result. We had several issues in residence, with drugs and sex trafficking, that we don't normally get there, that we had to get a handle on quickly. ... It created a real opportunity for some interdisciplinary education ... social work, nursing, medicine all worked together to try and solve some of the issues in residence, it was fantastic, and we had three faculty leads, they coordinated with their faculties ....

As Esther mentioned, two issues that arose from having inner city evacuees in residence were drugs and sex trafficking. Esther explained that the city, police and some faculties in the university managed the follow up on the issue:

The city, the police and our social work faculty with Medicine and Nursing managed some of the follow up from that situation ...

During the flood as Esther pointed out, communication was done over the phone due to the closure of roads. This meant that leaders had to be clear in communication because there were no visual cues. Since this was the first crisis the university was handling, several issues were encountered which required brainstorming sessions, quick decision making and opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration. In addition, the campus residences were needed to host evacuees from the flood, and this created all kinds of logistical problems for the university. According to Esther the university solved these logistical problems by creating partnerships between the faculties in the university and the city.

#### **Esther and the crisis of the wildfire.**

The incident of the fire was a tragedy. Esther assumed that there would be evacuees, however, she did not expect that the university would end up taking in as much as 1300-1400 evacuees. Although the numbers of evacuees were higher than expected, the university hosted the evacuees, showed concern and was proactive to find ways to help. Such support included provided programming and ensuring that schooling for kids of the evacuees was continued. As Esther put it:

... we had around 1300 or 1400 evacuees. Within a day of that fire we knew, very early on, that we would take in evacuees. ... they were driving down that highway. ... Evacuation is an operational piece, we said if there are kids coming with the evacuees, we need to make sure they are not displaced from their school. They are obviously displaced in the fire ... how can we help? And are there schools that we can work with ... and so, we worked with the school board to situate those schools and to situate kids ... we had children in our residents [evacuees' kids] ... we did some programing through the faculty of Kinesiology ... specifically, for those children.

Esther's view is clearly that the university worked well with the community in the context of this crisis in order to solve problems such as the location of children and their continued schooling.



### **Esther and collaborations/partnerships.**

The discussion turned to collaborations and partnerships between the university and external partners such as schools, the government and other crisis management agencies within the city, especially when dealing with city-wide crises and evacuations. Esther discussed these partnerships and collaborations highlighting internal and external collaborations:

We have direct connection with the city emergency management agency ... we also have a connection to the complementary provincial body and that was the body at work in the fire and they essentially were the ones that said we have X number of evacuees from the fire and we need people to take them. And what was surprising to me, is that we took more evacuees ... I am not quite sure of why or how that happened but at that time we were a pretty well-oiled machine and stepping up and helping. Our counterparts in the north were fantastic, they provided residence staff for the fire, they provided residence staff for the flood, because they knew we're going to get tired and we did the same thing when they had an issue up there ... I mean schools came together in the postsecondary area and they are really true to help one another.

In terms of effective collaborations and partnership, Esther was happy with the role the university played and how it handled the crisis based on the response from the evacuees. In her words:

The university was an excellent partner to the city and to the province, we took more evacuees than anybody anticipated us to. They were treated very well here and families for the most part in a very difficult circumstance, felt good about their transition back to where they needed to be and many are living in this city as opposed to going back north, they liked the way they were handled, they liked the fact that people took care of them, so I think generally it was very well handled.

The conversation then turned to the effective handling of all three crises. Esther was very sure they were effectively managed because no major issues arose except having to deal with a decision made by the government:

... The one thing there that I think was problematic, was not our issue ... [the city's board of] education just came out and said, "you don't have to write your provincial exams, we will base your marks or grades all on term work". Of course, they never asked us whether we will accept that ... once they made their announcements, we had no

choice, we had to turn around and say and we will accept those grades. There was no pre-conversation about how that will work or how we might have done it differently.

When asked what the university could have done differently in handling all three crises, she answered stating that there were debrief sessions in which the question of what could have been improved was tackled that allowed the crisis management team to assess the aftermath of response:

We do a debrief every single time we identify issues and we make sure they are incorporated into our next planning for the next crisis. One of the things we've learnt over a series of crises, is when you stand down from the crises management team and when you are back into normal operations [you are in a position to judge your response].

My sense is that Esther's remarks amount to this, that there is a tremendous need to collaborate during a crisis. Direct and established relationships that the university creates with internal faculties within the university and external government agencies such as the police or the city's emergency management agency allow for sharing of resources and information. The willingness of the university to share their resources and collaborate with external agencies demonstrates a comprehensive crisis management to promote an effective crisis response. After crisis management, debrief sessions are important to determine issues that need to be rectified before the next crisis response.

### **Esther and the murder of several university students.**

Murder is a terribly tragedy both for the murdered and their families and often for the murderer's family as well. It is a harrowing experience that changes lives forever. The murders of young students, their lives cut short in their prime, was a catastrophe for the community and the university. This crisis was the most emotional of all three situations. Esther became emotional and sad as she recalled the handling this crisis:

The ... situation was a bit different because it was an event off campus, but close to campus and it happened the evening of ... a big party on campus, the one tradition the university has. It's always a day when we get nervous and worried that with all the alcohol consumed that an issue was going to happen. I remember going to bed at around midnight, going back and forth with the vice-provost student experience and saying, it looks like everything's good and then about 5 o'clock, starting to receive messages that things were not good. By 7 o'clock, we were at the university in a crisis management team meeting trying to get information. The EOG [emergency operations group] was fully operational, the CMT [crisis management team] was fully operational and the first part of that crisis was really determining. ... The other piece was trying to understand what happened at that party, we heard relatively quickly that five students had died, and whether any of them were students at the university. We also knew there was a perpetrator who was also of the same age and was friends, we didn't know whether he was also a student of the university.

Information gathering, and quick response are two factors in crisis management and the first 24 hours is crucial to crisis response. Esther recalled trying to gather information about the issues that occurred as the crisis unfolded:

A lot of the beginning of that crisis was trying to determine what had happened and I can remember, we were preparing the president (who doesn't sit on CMT [crisis management team] but often is the spokesperson for the university issue) for a press conference ... with the chief of police ... and giving her some key messages that she was to deliver ... It was horrible for the community.

The other big piece was that we sort of had a heated debate about what does the university do? Because people needed an outlet for grieving. We agreed to host a vigil that night ... some people thought that wasn't our place, some people thought that was too soon, but there were others that really argued that it should be held early and that it should be held at our campus. We knew early in the morning that five people had lost their lives and we knew it was at a student's home and we knew that some of our students were at that party and we knew that there was the likelihood that some of our students may have lost their lives and it was a most heated argument we had and probably one of the best decisions we made.

The community was grieving and needed to receive some sort of comfort and a way to process the pain. The most important decision was to have an early vigil in which leaders of faith and counselors were brought in to talk to people who needed support. The importance of working with the right partners during a crisis of death cannot be over emphasized. Esther

pointed out that that the university needed to understand its role and the role of her partners to manage this impacting wide spread crisis:

... identifying who had been killed is not our job and the notification of next of kin is completely the job of the police. The really important piece in that was really understanding and knowing what our role was versus what the role of the police was and all the emergence management systems, because it was not on our campus. ... All of the postsecondary in the city were impacted ... it was important to communicate with our people about what they were doing, it was important to communicate with faculties of which the professors, students and faculty were reeling because they had lost people.

As Esther talked about the murders, she became emotional, it was obviously a very difficult time for her and for the university. I felt concern for her and gave her a few minutes to compose herself. She decided to continue with the interview. Her sadness, pain and grief were visible as she spoke:

... the identification of bodies in that situation was really difficult. The next thing of course was the people who had been at the party, many of whom were our students and making sure we got them the help that they needed, and we also had to work with their parents to make sure they got the help that they needed. There were five funerals that were set up, two of us went to all of the funerals. That was really difficult, really tough. We met with the families, we met with the parents, it was really hard.

The university came up with different strategies to support students and staff, as they tried to cope with the situation, such as giving students opportunity to reschedule or miss an exam, especially those who were directly involved in the crisis. A year after the murders the university held a memorial service. In Esther's words:

We said on the first anniversary that we would hold a memorial service, so we did that, that was huge, we held it in our main gym, very broadly attended both by students on campus and by the university. We had to work very closely with students who were at that party to help them finish their school and I think the last student just convocated last year, and that was credit to our counselling team and all the rest ... it was interesting dealing with a variety of issues during that time, but the exam was a big piece.

Esther talked about the lessons they learned as they managed this crisis:

This was an emotional one ... people lost their lives, they were young, people needed to take care of each other, but I think in hindsight we could have gotten some counseling for the CMT [crisis management team] we certainly could have gotten some counseling for people ... to make sure we were being taken care of and there were no things, this was triggering for other crises that had happened in our lives in different ways. I thought we handled the crisis very well. I thought having the early vigil was a good thing to do ... the way counselors dealt with students was good ... it was positive the way we dealt with exams even though we got critiqued for it, I would not change that. ... I think there were a series of things that were handled quite well.

Two decisions set the tone for later communications, which were important, and I kept the deans in the loop continually on one situation. We were very good at tapping into our volunteers ...

According to Esther a crisis is an opportunity to make strategic changes, improve and update crises management plans. Esther then looked back at changes made to improve crisis management plans and response:

We said to activate the EOG [emergency operations group] earlier, even if they are on standby, so we have an advanced EOG [emergency operations group]. ... we created a booking system, centralized and blended, whereby, the CMT [crisis management team] and EOG [emergence operations group] can quickly determine what events are taking place and when, so if we had to cancel them we could. We needed to communicate with the witnesses at the party sooner than we did, we noticed this on the first day but did not move quickly enough. It would have been helpful to develop information to provide the police victim services, so they could inform the witnesses of those resources, we did contact them, but it took us a while to get the names and ... get a meeting with them.

Esther continued:

... For the memorial, we had it on the same day but in hindsight, we thought we might have had it a little bit earlier [in the same day rather than in the evening], so students could have participated more because by then it went into exams, but everyone agreed that the memorial was very well done. In terms of communication issues and recommendations, we recommended that university relations reach out to the EOG [emergency operations group] to help in communicating with others (staff) affected in a timely manner ... there are just so many people involved in a crisis like this. To speed up communication, it was recommended that Can messages be prepared in advance and tweaked at the time ... I think we have about 100 canned. When details were released about the victims who attended the university, clubs that they had belonged to were also named, it would have been good for us to call those clubs in advance to let them know

they were doing that. ... We said we had to examine the issues of ... mental health, we've done both of those.

This crisis was emotionally intense, and the impact was visibly felt by all. The loss of five young lives was overwhelming. Leaders tried to make sense and meaning from the scanty information they had initially received. These remarks by Esther suggest that it was important to communicate with key stakeholders, students, staff, faculty and external public. The university was present and visible throughout this crisis as they played an important role of providing support, avenues for students to grieve, and counselors, in addition to collaborating with the police and the families of the victims. Several changes were made according to Esther in order that the communication strategies be more effective. This was the most challenging of the crises to deal with, because of the extreme emotional overlay and the necessity of acting very quickly.

#### **Esther and crisis communication.**

The discussion concluded with crisis communication tools (social media, newspapers and tv stations) employed during all three crises. Esther talked about how efficiently these tools were employed during the crises, and acknowledged some of the challenges:

One of the pieces in the communication strategy around any crisis was making sure that we had a series of canned messages that could go out to the community updating them on events. We have an emergency app that people can sign up for, that's been very successful in terms of getting messages out. ... We have an email tree, it takes a long time though for messages to come through. ... We have TVs located around campus, those help. But predominately, it was the emergency app and ... getting information on our webpage, you know that's not good though, if your webpage goes down, that's why the phone messages is good because it can happen without the IT system operating. We've done multimodal to try and accommodate. There were times when through the twitter feed, we were finding as much real time information as we could relative to what we had access to whether it was TV, whether it was newspaper or blogs or whatever. People are on twitter and that can either help a crisis in getting information out or it can exacerbate things because the wrong information gets out, and that did happen a couple of times and we had to correct information on the web and in response to twitter to say

the university has a twitter handle, but social media has really changed the game in how you communicate around a crisis.

Communication strategy around a crisis was an important point made by Esther. Esther lists the different communication tools employed by the university to communicate with stakeholders. She highlights the fact that social media has changed the dynamics in communication and the need to constantly communicate the right information.

### **Esther and training.**

The conversation turned to emergency management training and procedures. Esther outlined the distinct structure for handling emergencies and crisis, highlighting the important fact of creating a crisis management team upon her arrival to the university:

... We have a well-defined crises management structure ... an emergency operations group is operational level which includes the planning, the logistics. The communications group, which is the group that gets us all the information that we need to make decisions. ... The crises management team ... is at the strategic level of decision making and works to protect the reputation of the university during a crisis. ... This was an important missing piece that we added when I arrived, we didn't have that in our structure.

When asked if her training could have prepared her to handle the crisis of the murders, Esther explained:

I don't think you're ever prepared to go to five funerals in one week, I don't think there's anything in my background that will prepare me for that. I don't know what kind of training, I would have had that could have prepared me for that. So, I would say dealing with such a crisis, you have to rely on experience, you have to rely on good judgement ... you want to test judgment when you are hiring people and the experience of those individuals to be able to handle these kinds of events. But no, I would say I would be lying if I thought I was prepared, I prepare to run a meeting, I am prepared to make difficult decisions when they are required to make but to deal with the emotional turmoil, no.

Although this leader could draw upon her years of experience in running an institution, nothing in her experience could have prepared her to handle five students' murders, because of

the emotional trauma, the demands, the complexities and intensity of such a crisis. This is an example of the kind situation in which no amount of prior preparation will be relevant or suffice.

A university's reputation during a crisis can either be gained or lost. Creating the right crisis management team and emergency operations group with responsibilities of each group clearly delineated would enable the university to speak and respond more effectively and efficiently to a crisis.

### **Esther and selfcare/mental healthcare.**

Selfcare is something leaders should consider during, and after dealing with crisis situations. I was curious to know Esther's selfcare habits after a crisis. Esther replied:

... We identified that we had to take care of ourselves, because this was an issue I would say related to mental health and that brought that home in spades. The crisis ... was short and intense in response. ... In response to your specific question of what we did, we supported one another, we did not have counselors that were bought in for our team. We might have considered that in hindsight, but the counselors quite frankly were busy with students. Could we have had someone provided for staff come in and do something maybe, we didn't do that though. I think the people that probably needed it most were a couple of us that went to the funeral. We were great up until the fifth one ... we both had breakdowns in the car coming back. I had to stop the car because you recognize the enormity of the potential of five young lives that had been lost, ... and what they had to give to the communities they were going to live in and how impactful this was for their families and for all the communities. It just was a horrible loss.

I asked if any mental health programs came out of this tragedy, Esther answers:

Well, I will say the mental health strategy, really, I mean it was on the docket to be done ... we got the National College for Health Assessment Survey results that indicated we had issues with students and we had absentee data from staff with the number one reason for absenteeism being stress related, but we also had this issue. We characterized it as a mental health issue and so those three things coming together, we created a mental health strategy for the university. This was certainly one piece of that, an important piece.

The depth of pain experienced by this leader was intense. The enormity of the situation was overwhelming. Leaders recognized the importance of providing caring and support for others but neglect to take care of themselves. Unfortunately, these types of crisis can inflict



trauma and could lead to posttraumatic stress disorder. Mental health was a critical issue brought forward by the tragedy.

### **Participant #2 Cynthia**

Cynthia is the vice provost student experience. Her role spans students' academic life, their wellness and academic support services. She deals with all issues that impact the overall student experience. She envelops you with her warmth, calmness and compassion. We sat in the conference room across each other, as she talked, you felt she had so much experience working with students and dealing with different types and levels of crises. From dealing with very difficult and emotional crises such as students' suicides to mundane everyday crises.

Cynthia described her role as having a title and a job profile and likens it to "curriculum as planned, and curriculum as lived." She elaborated further on how her role is conceptualized as having some sort of horizontal institutional oversight of some of the issues, processes and policies that transcend all the faculties. "It is an equivalent of a dean's position, but it goes across the institution." Her portfolio spans student recruitment, admissions, registral functions, student lifestyle, student awards, scholarships and convocations. In addition, she has oversight of student wellness services, including wellness center, counselling, medical services, student accessibility services, and is an anti-sexual violence advocate. These services she referred to as "tender loving care services for students." Inclusive, as well are the academic support services for students. In addition to her work schedule, Cynthia is part of the crisis management team. She explained that her expertise and experience is brought to the team when a crisis impacts students.

### **Cynthia and prior crisis experiences.**

Cynthia recalled her prior experiences in handling crises. She talked about handling everything from mundane everyday crises to bigger situations. She is no stranger to crises management, as she spends her days dealing with all kinds of crises:

We have many crises occur ... on a weekly basis. We talk about it being a crisis, because it actually impedes the ability of people to function ... it could be as simply as ... a portfolio wide professional development day and we can't run it because the catering doesn't work or the photocopy. ... Another crisis would be individual's personal crisis, brought to the institution, these will be people who are suicidal. I have had people come into my office and say my brother is going to kill himself and if he kills himself, I'm going to kill myself ... that's a crisis you need to deal with and is not uncommon that I will deal with those types of things. ... I was involved with a university, when I worked there with the H1N1 that was an institutional crisis because it affected the ability of students. ... I was involved on the periphery of that institutional crises.

I probed further wanting to know what the thinking process was for her when she handled these crises especially in suicide cases. Cynthia readily replied in a thoughtful and contemplative manner, weighing her words carefully:

I think a lot of it comes very intuitively because of the experiences you have. ... I think for me, there are some fundamental principles that you need to keep in mind and one is people need to be safe, it's a human life ... and the second one is that we are fair and equitable, and I know that sounds weird when are talking about suicide context. You need to be very calm ... I would say they are the sort of values that you really need to stick to when you are managing a crisis.

An extensive experience in crisis management has given Cynthia a deep understanding of how to handle suicide cases, while being compassionate. Understanding the values of compassion, care and support can go a long way to help students because every human life is valuable and should be protected.

### **Cynthia and the competencies of a crisis leader.**

It is important that a crisis leader be competent in handling crisis. Cynthia described what she believed were the competencies an effective crises leader should portray. She emphasized the need to be experienced, be prepared, make prompt decisions based on evidence and the importance of training. In her words, Cynthia explained:

You must have a lot of experience ... be prepared ... have training. ... Be calm and ... be able to make decisions, but you also need to be very thoughtful in that decision making. We always talk about evidential basis to make decisions. ... You need to be open to the evidence coming in, but you need to be able to think about what that means and make a decision very quickly.

Cynthia's list of competencies supports in part the literature on crisis competencies by Demiroz and Kapucu (2012), who listed 15 different crisis competencies that crisis leaders should possess including Cynthia's ones.

### **Cynthia and the crisis of the flood.**

In the next sections, Cynthia talked about three major crises; flood, wildfire and murders that affected the university. Cynthia explained that the crisis of the flood caught everyone by surprise, both the city and the university. The city had not experienced flooding at this level, and therefore was not as prepared to deal with the crisis. Cynthia became an evacuee, in her words:

... We were in the park at the time ... we saw the flood coming in really quickly. It was quite scary the speed which the flood was coming in ... we went back to the house, ... the police came and got us out and said the dam is about to burst and we had to leave the house immediately. So, we came up and stayed here in this office [her office at the university].

She was affected by the flood, and eventually relocated to residence. Despite her situation, she was available and willing to support the university and all the other evacuees.

Cynthia recalled her experience:

... I was an evacuee myself, after spending the night in my office, myself and my family we went into residence. ... the city said do not go to work, because this is a major crisis. ... The city needed to mobilize volunteers and so we spent a lot of time ... discussing how we could allow people to volunteer in their work time. ... It was logistically quite challenging ... with regards to the evacuees ... the real challenge for us was working out how many spaces we had, how many people we could accommodate, we had to also house the Royal Canadian Mounties Police with their equipment ... who were part of the efforts. ... We all played a role in making sure that ... supports were given to the individuals. I think the controversial piece about the evacuees were the homeless community, that created a very interesting dynamic on campus. People were very concerned about that, there was an impact on our community. But nevertheless, irrespective of those challenges, I think everybody believed it was still the right thing to do.

Cynthia's sense of responsibility for the evacuees outweighed any thoughts for her personal predicament of being homeless. She was focused on providing the necessary support to others and ensuring that they were safe and had a place to stay.

### **Cynthia and the crisis of the wildfire.**

Cynthia's initial reaction to the fire was more of a spectator, she assumed that the fire was a long way off, not realizing that the university would become a major part of the evacuation process:

I think it was a case of well it's a long way away, you know forest fires, we are pretty used to it here. It's difficult to know whether it's going to be massive or small, so it was a case of oh you know, it's terrible, ... but didn't feel like it was going to be a major issue for us here.

The university was not expected to be involved with the crisis of the fire because the fire did not happen on campus but at a remote location some 745km away. They were willing to support as much as they could with whatever supplies and personnel were required, however, they ended up becoming a major hub for the evacuees of the fire, providing accommodation and relief. Cynthia talks about the university's involvement in handling the crisis and the evacuees:

... we did not think that we were going to be as impacted as we were because you've got all these places between the fire's location and us. However, what we did then understand was that many of the accommodations ... was not satisfactory ... the province asked us to take evacuees ... we had pets, animals, children, everything, which of course is contrary to our regulations, but we did that, and they were hugely appreciative of being with us for that period of time. We were complacent at the beginning because ... the crisis was not around campus, but we ended up supporting a crisis that was many miles away. I think the complacency at the beginning was that we didn't think we would be called upon in such a big way to help.

I was curious to know what the processes were if such a crisis happened on campus.

Cynthia reflected on the question pointing out the trauma associated with a crisis on campus:

... when a crisis happens there is trauma, the trauma associated with the place, whereas really for the flood and the fire the trauma is somewhere else, for the people who are impacted by that trauma, this is a safe place to recover and be given support and ... be cared for. Whereas, when a crisis happens on campus, there's shock and disbelief because it's impacted the place that you work, you live, you study. There's still a fear of being unsafe, so it's very different, I believe very different.

Although the crisis of the wildfire happened in another city, the university became a major hub for hosting evacuees because the province required help and support. The university provided a safe place of recovery to people who had suffered the trauma of losing everything and running for their lives.

### **Cynthia and the murders of several university students.**

As a beginner researcher, one of the toughest questions, I have had to ask was about the crisis of the murders of several young students. It was a heart wrenching moment, a painful recollection of the days of handling this traumatic event. As Cynthia talked about this harrowing experience, she became emotional at one point. I was concerned for her well-being, but she continued the discussion as she self-reflected. Cynthia talked about her initial reactions to the news. Cynthia's recollections were:

When crisis happens, they unfold, you don't get all the information to start with. Am an early bird, I put the radio on at five in the morning and I heard on [the news] that there had been a death at a student party. On the last day of classes, we are all on high alert because we know there's a lot of drinking going on and so on and we are very acutely prepared for an event like that, however, the death was ... at a party ... I phoned my boss ... I tell her have you listened to the news ... she said no, she hadn't heard it, she put the radio on. The deaths had increased from two to three, so at that point she said we will call in the crisis management team. seven o'clock was the starting point for the crisis management team. All the crisis management team were here on site ready to manage the crisis. We were pretty ready for it.

Losing anyone causes a deep sense of loss, but several students at once, is a deep heart wrenching sense of loss. These were senseless deaths, changing the lives of many people involved. We talked about how the university handled this sad crisis. Cynthia:

... when you have student death involved, it's extremely sad, you put your emotions aside. We were obviously concerned about other members, about the community, about the family, we were concerned about who they were ... we put together the EOG [emergency operations group]. ... We thought the crisis management team could handle it without an EOG [emergency operations group] and it became clear that it couldn't. It unfolded over time, we got information on the number of deaths, and then we were getting information from the police on who these people were, and we were trying to find out which faculty they were in, what their names were ... There was going to be a news conference at the police headquarters at that time, the decision was made that the university president ... would speak at the police news media broadcast ... the president did an amazing job in very challenging circumstances. We did hold a gathering for the community, that was brilliant, that was really and important thing. ... It's interesting that in a crisis management situation, you get down to the minutia ... We had chaplains come as well. ... This incident happened at the main exam period ... So, given our experiences with the flood, we just enacted the whole thing straight away. If you needed a deferral, it doesn't matter you get it.

The university worked hard to obtain information from the police, plan a memorial service and ensure that the university community was safe. Amidst all these preparations, information gathering and confusion, the students who had experienced the stabbings were forgotten. These students needed support to deal with this harrowing ordeal they had witnessed. In Cynthia's words:

The mother of the student who was renting the house called and said what are [you] going to do to support these kids? ... They were distraught ... we quickly mobilized a team of counsellors. The counsellors went over to ... the kids who had survived, who had experienced it. It was a small group, but the group got bigger because there were more people there earlier on in the evening, but they had left. There was that survivor guilt from the bigger group.

There were lessons to learn from this crisis. Although it was a short crisis, it was emotionally, and psychologically intense and quick and fast decisions had to be made. During this process of decision making, some vital things may be overlooked, and tensions can rise. In the aftermath of the crisis, in retrospect, you see ways to improve or could have handled the crisis better. Cynthia recounted some of those experiences:

That piece around the mom calling me saying “why aren’t you here helping the kids”? Maybe we could have figured that out before she called, nevertheless, we were there very quickly, but it’s interesting, because I did call the families of people whom I knew ... They were pretty suspicious of who I was, one mother pretended she was the maid, cause, she thought I was a journalist trying to find out information about her daughter, that was interesting ... I think people had got wind of who they were and then would call.

Overall, I think we handled the crisis really well, there were some people who found it emotionally too much and then others, we sort of keep going ... after some time, you feel the personal impact. I think we did a good job.

She discussed the effective handling of the crisis and the challenges they faced:

I think the flood highlighted some of the deficit in our processes. One example is that we have different systems for booking space on campus, we have one for booking classrooms, one for conference and events, faculties have their own rooms they book. We needed to know who had events on campus, there was a couple of conferences, as an institution we did not know the full extent of who was on campus and as a result of that there has been changes to how to book and record use of space on the campus ... Another issue was staff working at home, you know ... we closed the university for four days, was that work, was that not work? When the university was closed, we still needed people to work and some people were technically off for four days and then we needed other people to be on the phones talking to students, that was a learning opportunity. I think we managed it, but it was pretty unclear how we were going to account for that. I think all in all we did a great job, but we fixed a few things as a result of the processes we went through.

Cynthia continued:

I think the prove is in how we've dealt with things, and I think all three major crises we've worked through, I think we are all really pleased and actually the external reviews because we brought in people afterwards post event to review our practices and for each and every one of them they said we did a superb job.

There was an initial confusion as the university began to make sense of the situation.

Leaders had to come up with humane, practical solutions that were socially desirable that provided emotional support to the students, faculty and staff including the community. The goal of the university was to bring some form of healing and support to everyone as they responded in ways, they felt could make some positive impact on the university community. The murders had inflicted deep pain on the university community and leaders.

Cynthia was pleased with the university's response in all three crises especially as the university received positive external reviews. The university's reputation remained good.

### **Cynthia and collaborations/partnerships.**

Partnerships and collaborations are an important aspect of crisis management. Therefore, forming the right collaborations and effective partnership can make the processes crisis management more efficient. Cynthia explained:

We have a team of staff who do that city relationships and government relations ... We have people that are responsible for those liaisons. Our community relations people took care of all the volunteering piece, we then had government relations that work for the city. The crisis management team attend to the EOG [emergence operations group] and they work very closely with the province emergency people.

Cynthia's comments collaborate with what the literature says about a clear allocation of leadership for various portfolios, this leads to an overall strengthening of capacity through building strong partnerships (Egeland, 2005).



### **Cynthia and crisis communication.**

Communication is an integral part of crisis response. Effective communication during a crisis can help mitigate the impact that crisis has on stakeholders such as students, staff, and the community. The community was affected by the murders and needed information about the scale, any lingering risks, and explanations. In fact, the public watched the crisis unfold on television, read about event in the newspaper, and tracked developments online. The news stations were equally constantly reporting and scouting about for information to report. I asked Cynthia what steps the university took to disseminate information to the public. Cynthia:

We have university relations who do all the communications, they were approved by the crisis management team. Much of the CMT [crisis management team] at that time were preparing the communications on the website ... social media was at place, some people were saying who had died, police asked us not to release the names, and not to speak about the names of the students, other institutions did and we were criticized for not using the names of students but we complied with the police request and till they released that information ... The media were all over campus and for some time afterwards, the students who were involved particularly the lad whose house it was, felt unsafe to be on campus, because of being hound by the media, they wanted to speak to him. We had to try and protect those students from the media. They were all over the place, they were talking to kids, you know, they just wanted anyone they could speak to. It was a world news item, it was not just a Canadian piece. I think our communications were great, we put everything on the website, and we updated it maybe every hour, the main website didn't shut down ... but it was, here's the latest update ... two or three sentences every half hour. Communication was pretty high level, we wanted to make sure people are cared for, rest assured there is no danger, you know you have to tell people there's no danger but that we need to support each other, we need to come together as a community, so that sort of languaging. It was all timed stamped and of course it's in reverse order, you've got the most up to date information first, but you could then track back through the communications that we sent out. The communications down at the police headquarters was great.

Stakeholders want to see a leader, someone who is visible to the media and public, a rallying point for crisis management and control. Cynthia explained that the institution was visible and in control during all crises.

... You need the president to be speaking, you need a spokesperson particularly on the news. Particularly when several young people have lost their lives. If it's a sort of minor crisis you could have somebody less senior speak, but you need the big person at the top to speak for sure.

Any crisis attracts media attention from all over the world, this crisis was no different as the university was thrust into a hub of media attention. As the crisis became an international situation, effective and crucial communication was necessary. The university was proactive and forthcoming in their communication by clearly communicating safety and being visible to the public. In addition, being driven by their sense of responsibility to the survivors, the university sought to protect the students from all the media attention, to reduce the level of pain and harm these students were experiencing.

### **Cynthia and training.**

The importance of training and emergency procedures cannot be overlooked. Cynthia elaborated on the university's emergency structure, but she did not expand further on what the processes were:

we do have processes, and procedures. We have the crisis management team, we have a channel on the emergence app for the crisis management team. ... Every unit must have business continuity plans for everything. It's a very distributed model that we are all responsible for. ... Every unit has that ownership ... We all know what we are going to do when issues hit the functioning of our units. We have some documents, we have some processes, we have some shared points that's evolved and grown over time.

She continued:

... We have lots of practice, we have tabletop exercises and we are very used to working as a team. We've had a few major crises that we've dealt with and well, you do have people come and go, many of the core people are still there and we regularly train together for such eventualities. We're pretty used to working with each other and know where the boundaries are.

It is obvious from the participant's response that the university has different processes in place for crisis management. These processes include setting up communications, business continuity plans by various units, knowledge of institutional processes and a crisis management team. Tabletop exercises provided opportunities for corporate learning and sharing of expertise as team members can learn from one another about different risks they had not considered.

### **Cynthia and selfcare/mental healthcare.**

Selfcare and mental health are important aspects of how leaders respond to crisis. It is so important that leaders have a good understanding of their own involvement in such an emotionally charged event. Cynthia explained that she didn't think she needed selfcare:

I didn't get any, I didn't ask for any. I think we are more in the caring mode looking after our staff ... the staff took it hard, they had students calling crying. I was more anxious and concerned about others than myself ... I was impacted. We did a debrief on the murders with the crisis management team and I went into the room, this was many months after and I went into the room where we had met as a crisis management team and I just had a wave of emotion come over me, because it was the same people at the table, same room and it sort of brought back the disbelief, the shock, it was just a wave, it really took me by surprise. I am quite an emotional person but not in a work situation, I did not weep at all at murders or the fire or the flood, I am pretty resilient in these crisis situations but in that debrief it was just a wave and it was gone in a couple of minutes, I had a few tears and then I got myself together, I think even talking to you now I feel a little bit of emotion.

Cynthia then shared her final thoughts on the question as she explained why she felt she did not need selfcare and mental health care:

I just don't feel I needed it, maybe other people may feel I needed it. I am able to compartmentalize my work, I deal with it, I put it on one side. I don't think it has impacted me apart from certainly that emotional connection to the families, which is really important to me. I have a high level of resiliency.

Leaders feel the need to ensure that care and concern is shown for others often to the neglect of their care and concern. These leaders often ignored their personal needs as they tend to

forget that they are also human and that a crisis may influence them negatively and emotionally. Although this leader showed resilience, it was obvious that the emotional trauma of dealing with students' murders were still present with her.

### **Participant #3 Ann**

Ann is the vice president of development alumni engagement. She is responsible for all aspects of fund raising, donor engagement, alumni relations, communications, marketing and events associated with both the donor community and the alumni community. She oversees gift compliance, insuring that money is spent according to donor intent, the tracking of constituent information, data adhering to all donor and alumni privacy laws. She is happy to talk about her experiences dealing with crises, having lived close to a university with a shooter incident. She believes the university has an “experienced or mature crises management team” and her role in the team is to be a vocal member of the group in terms of providing recommendations on next steps given the scenario, and as the point person on anything that relates to donor and/or alumni implications.

#### **Ann and prior crisis experiences.**

Ann moved to Canada to work. In her former country, the crisis response structure involved both the FBI and the police which is different from the Canadian context. She was also a member of the crisis management team in her former workplace. She recounts her prior experiences with crises:

This university ... is my first postsecondary experience in Canada ... I was part of our crisis management team down there, in my former place, which was very different than up here. It definitely was a bit of culture shock when I moved here and was on our crisis management team, because we run things very differently than our crisis management team down in the US [United States], ... so anytime a threat or a crisis occurs you know it's not that the police are involved, it's that the FBI is involved and national security. I

was very struck that when I moved here the fact that our security officers, I don't think that anybody carries a weapon on campus, and so maybe there's a few people ... but being on crisis management teams governed by a different culture where ... all of our security guards are heavily armed on campus down there. ... I was down there during the Virginia Tech shooting. Virginia Tech is not too far ... just a couple hours away, it definitely changed the climate and the culture to how we response to acts of violence on campus. Almost kind of a No tolerance philosophy. ... Its governed by a very different culture as I find out here, its perhaps a little more consultative, or you're looking at things from a variety of different perspectives, but there in the [United States], it's how do you contain and eliminate a threat as soon as possible with the least number of casualties, that would be the governing principal of our crisis management team.

Ann talked a bit more about the Virginia Tech crisis:

... It was a huge shock on the campus community ... I can't remember if classes were even cancelled that day. A moment of fear and panic and just being consumed by what had just taken place. I think the immediate reaction was that the university had handled it very well, it was only through further investigation and learnings about what could have been done differently. I think it really cast a light on the importance of mental health, and the general student body and identifying traits that may cause one to take notice of someone who may be acting suspiciously or out of character.

The possibility that violent attacks could occur on campus is now a reality that leaders must deal with. Higher education leaders need to be prepared and be in collaboration with the authorities to eliminate these violent attacks as soon as possible with the least number of casualties. The resulting effect of these violent attacks are fear, shock and trauma inflicted on campus communities often deeply psychological and may be felt for years. Key issues of mental health and the identification of certain pre-incident behaviors are ways to identify perpetrators of violence before the act is committed was raised by this participant.

### **Ann and the competencies of a crisis leader.**

Specific competencies are required for managing crises. Ann focused on the importance of time and effective decision making:

Decisive, the ability to not get overwhelmed or involved in too many of the details. But to be able to take a step back to look at the bigger picture, the impact. Being able to envision

and walk through a variety of different scenarios quickly. I think in effective crisis management leadership time is of the essence. As leaders you can get trapped or paralyzed in going through different what if scenarios that actually take away from the fact that at the end of the day you have to make a decision and you have to work with the facts that you have, and you have to make the best decisions with the facts that you know at the time. I think people are looking for leaders to take decisive actions and that's one of the greatest challenges, but also the largest responsibility.

She continued to talk about how these competencies can be demonstrated as a team member:

... When you are dealing with a crisis and you have people, everyone is coming into a crisis with their own worldview and their own perceptions of what actions should or should not be taken and sometimes we get stuck in the consultative process. So, knowing your place in terms of my role on this team is not provide input on every single aspect of it, but I have to trust my colleagues who own those portfolios, to do what's right by that area, just like they would trust me to do what's right by the development, the fund raising implications of this action or the alumni relations implications..... sometimes I think people may feel that because they serve on this team it's their responsibility to weigh in on every single aspect of it. My experience at least here has been when we do that, it takes away from our ability to make decisions.

Understanding the essence of time, recognizing individual worldviews, trusting each other and being decisive were some of the competencies highlighted by this participant. She identified long consultative processes and the need for everyone to contribute as a hindrance to quick decision making.

#### **Ann and crisis of the wildfire.**

Ann was not at the university during the crises of the flood and the murders. However, she was here for the fire and she talked about her initial reaction, sharing that it was important to ensure that people were safe.

... devastation, feeling for the community, for people that had lost everything. At the time, I wasn't too sure what the role of the university might be, beyond insuring that any faculty or student that we had ... was safe.

Ann's recounted the university's role in handling the crisis and the evacuees.

When they [the evacuees] started to arrive ... I was on maternity leave, I kinda had one foot in, one foot out. I heard about the university's role as we started taking in evacuees. It was very interesting to see the whole university community mobilized around the evacuees both from an educational perspective, sports and recreational, mental health, food, lodging. I mean the number of volunteer hours people on campus put in, I was truly inspired by that act of service, for me that was a very interesting take away from the university's role. Sure, we can put people up in housing, but the fact that our community came together to support the evacuees and ensured that they were cared for in form of mind, body and spirit was truly heartwarming.

The discussion turned to Ann's opinion on the university's handling of the crisis of the flood.

... because of the way the community rallied around the evacuees, and you know learning a little bit about their stories. ... The people whom we were supporting and helping truly had nowhere else to go and I think it was a true testament, the spirit of the university community that got together, really to support them. Hearing stories of some of the kids who could participate in the gymnastics program, they [the university] ran special gymnastics program for children which was really heartwarming.

This finding suggests that the participation of the campus community in supporting evacuees was tremendous. There was a high-level institutional commitment to helping alleviate the suffering of those who had lost their properties and homes to the fire. Various resources such as food and lodging were made readily available to evacuees. These positive experiences became inspirations of acts of service as viewed by the participant.

#### **Ann and crisis communication.**

Ann talked about internal communication between the crisis management team.

... I think that an important often overlooked aspect of crises management is just the need to communicate regularly and consistently even if you don't have anything to say, even if there aren't any updates, because silence is nobody's friend during a crisis. I think you know we've made great progress with emergency app. [The] team would send out emails probably every few days just on the number of evacuees that we were housing ... we were tracking everything, down to the specific needs of the individuals and concerns associated with that and that is very helpful because you can use that to inform lessons learned and best practice.

She is concerned with communication around sexual attacks and assault.

... We call CMT [crisis management team] meetings for things that also have reputational risk in the university, such as concerns about student health and wellness, issues of sexual assault or violence and that is often more challenging issues, ... but more challenging to communicate. How do you communicate that there's been x number of violence of sexual attacks on campus? How do you keep your community, your students safe through communication? I think that's a challenge, because it's easy to communicate to people about, take cover, like a lock down or classes are canceled, things that almost follow a sequence of events, but I think one of the challenges in the postsecondary environment now particularly with the prevalence of primarily of sexual violence on campus whether it's with sports teams ... those are truly crises for institutions that have huge reputational risks and often in a lot of those situations you look back and go ... oh the university could have done things differently and it often has to do with communications and just paying attention when things are raised.

Reputational risk and communication around sexual violence were key issues emphasized by the respondent. Both issues affect the university due to their devastating high impact on the institution's integrity.

### **Ann and training.**

Crisis cannot be effectively handled if there is no preparation or training. Ann explained that there was detailed and robust training for major crises, however, she recommends that the university have a plan of action for smaller crisis:

The crises management team go through regular kind of different scenarios, whether its man-made or natural crisis. ... I would say the risk portfolio is quite mature and robust in terms of the details, and the various scenarios that we've run through. I have a lot of confidence that when a crisis happens and a CMT meeting is called, we all just kinda of drop everything and go. ... We walk through and explore a variety of different scenarios. However, I do feel like we spend a lot of time on the extreme scenarios, whether it's you know a shooter on campus, kidnappings or ransoms, things that are obviously very important to ensure you have a plan, but also like very very extreme. So, my recommendation to our crisis management team has been, you know what about threats ... that are perhaps aren't as extreme but is just as important for us to have a plan of action. I don't think we are as well prepared on the ones that are perhaps not as extreme. I think if a shooter comes on campus and we've done scenarios where shooters have taken



out like 50 people, very extreme, we've got a plan for that, but on the ones that, violence on campus that's perhaps not as extreme as that, I don't know, I don't feel as prepared.

In the context of training, the university provides ample training opportunities for crisis leaders. A concern explained by the participant was the lack of preparedness for less extreme cases on campus.

### **Ann and self-care/mental health.**

Ann shares her final thoughts as she talks about mental health signs and why it is important to seek help.

I think acknowledgment that it's okay to seek help after crises that there are residual impacts or posttraumatic impact after crises that may happen months even after the crises has taken place, so some acknowledgment, what signs to look for in yourself. If you are having trouble sleeping or trouble eating that all of these could be signs of PTSD and that these are the services that are available to you through university and it comes down to communication, communicated to all faculty and staff. Right now, that doesn't take place.

There is an expectation by victims and a certain level of dependence on their leaders for direction in a crisis and this often creates a situation where leaders assume they do not need help or support, they become stoic or heroic. Unfortunately, their mental health can become affected after handling several intense crises. It is important to affirm to leaders that it is okay to seek help and support and that they are human.

### **Participant #4 Pauline**

Pauline is the general counsel of the university, heading up a wide range of legal services function. Her role includes doing all the legal work for the university, everything from leases to swap agreements to employment matters for non-unionized employees. She manages all the litigation involving the university, where the university is either the plaintiff or the defendant. Legal services also handle things like human rights complaints, they give advice to various

appeals committee when students are involved in some sort of academic or non-academic misconduct. In addition, her department also has access to information and privacy group within legal services and so, they provide access to information training to faculty and staff, they deal with access to information requests, they deal with privacy breaches and they work with the lawyers in the group to give advice on personal information aspects of contracts, a lot of software contracts, things like that. They work with the lawyers in the office to give advice on the Canadian antispam legislation because that has a lot to do with how you handle personal information.

Her group also deals with all the gift agreement, not the regular templated gift agreement but other major gift agreements that development brings forward, gives advice to the alumni association in terms of how you deal with alumni to maintain compliance with the Canadian antispam legislation. The ODEPD, the office of diversity, equity and protective disclosure reports to me.

She works closely with the protective disclosure adviser. In addition to all these, she is a member of the CMT [crisis management team]. Her role in the crisis management team is to provide advice. Pauline has not had prior experiences in handling crisis.

**Pauline and competencies of a crisis leader.**

Asked what she considers to be the competencies of a crisis leader, Pauline elucidates calmness, and listening to diverse opinions. Pauline:

Someone who listens very carefully to first try to figure out what information there is and what information gaps there are. Someone who remains calm and measured and listens very carefully to diversity of opinions being expressed around the table. Can synthesize and analyze and is flexible and willing to modify as more information becomes available or as you try things and they are not working as expected it.

### **Pauline and the crisis of the flood.**

Crisis can be sudden, taking people by surprise, and the scope unpredictably. Pauline talked about her initial reaction during the flood:

... I was surprised by the scope of its cause. I came up to the university that morning, I came up early to go for a workout and then I got here I was listening to the radio and was realizing, I should probably get home while I could. There was the first crises management team meeting, I think it was at seven or seven thirty. When I was listening to the news early in the morning the scope of it wasn't registering clearly, I would never would have come up here and this was my first job at the university... During the flood people were displaced from their homes or shelters.

These people became evacuees not of their own making but due to the flood. Pauline was supportive of the decision made by the university to house these evacuees, she explained in detail:

I thought it was absolutely what we should be doing. Luckily it was in June our residence wasn't full. The university wasn't flooded which was a good thing, so I was very supportive of that decision I didn't see how we could say no ... and am proud of what the university did for the victims of the flood. ... We had to get the rooms ready, we realized we would have kids on campus and provide programming for them, we realized that these are not hotel rooms and people weren't coming the way students necessarily with computers and iPads and their own entertainment devices, so we had to set up some stuff for people to do to keep them active and not worried. We set up an area where people could get toiletries and clothes if they needed them, some people were evacuated quite quickly, we had to deal with feeding them, coping with various allergies with their pets and good thing we have a vet med school. And then just things like getting enough linens, towels and stuff ... these evacuees weren't bringing that ... they were distressed because of the flood, some of them had existing problems, including mental health problems, we had to make sure that they had enough medication, if they needed counseling support that that was available. A lot of them came without transportation. ... We tried to orient them to campus, there were all sorts of issues to deal with and then you did have a few bad actors, who ended up on campus and we had to deal with those, campus security worked with the police service because we couldn't have people doing drugs on campus especially with children on residence. As people moved out we had to make sure everything was properly cleaned and if we found that somebody had a serious medical issue, we had to make it was really deep cleaned.

After handling a crisis, it is important to evaluate how effective the response was. Were the decisions that were made considered to be appropriate? Pauline spoke about this:

I think it was effectively handled, I think we were very fortunate that we didn't have students, I mean we had some classes going on but for the most part residences were empty. I think we have a great EOG [emergency operations group] and they were very effective at sourcing linens, reaching out to people. ... When the crisis was continuing [we had] to get some help, in terms of supervising move ins and outs of residence and things like that. ... I think there were, after the fact, a few issues about how costs were kept track of to put in claims for cost recovery. ... I think in the big scheme of things those were minor. The important thing in the crisis was focusing on people and I think we did that quite effectively.

The participant recognized the importance of supporting and hosting evacuees of the flood although the nature of the evacuees received posed a major challenge to the university. The ability of the university to focus on people proved to be an effective approach to crisis response.

#### **Pauline and the crisis of the wildfire.**

The discussion then turned to the wildfire, Pauline was horrified at the extent of the fire.

I was horrified, I saw those pictures I couldn't believe it, it seemed to suddenly get out of control [people were evacuated]. A lot of them were coming to the city, ... so, we did what we had to do. ... We already had taken in evacuees from the flood, so we knew exactly what to do and how to mobilize and clearly these people needed a place to go.

Although we might prepare for these unpredictably events, we sometimes do not expect them to get out of control. When the wildfire got out of control, people needed to be evacuated and kept safe.

#### **Pauline and the murders of several university students.**

Educational leaders cannot solve murders, nor should they be expected to. However, these leaders can play an important role in ensuring that response to such situations are sensitive, and prompt, bringing in as much external resources to support victims. Pauline discussed the horror she felt and the university's response:

I was horrified, I heard about it in the news, I couldn't believe that several students had been murdered. Your heart just went out to the families and you felt helpless, because you can't comfort, there's no comfort and you know, you certainly don't want to say or do anything that might be viewed as insensitive and it's so hard to try and figure out, we are just so inadequate. I was quite involved because we wanted to organize that memorial service and of course, we wanted to speak to family members, because we only wanted to do it if they wanted us to. ...The family members of our students it was easy for us to contact them but the family members of students that weren't ours it was harder to contact them. ... We wanted to make sure that the university was at the funeral services for all the students not just our students. ... I think that was the most difficult crisis to deal with. I think they focused on what was really important, did what they could for the families and if the families wanted their son or daughter to get a degree, because some of them were about to graduate, if they didn't that was fine. Just trying to do things that would provide the families with the sense that they were being supported.

The participant's response points to the value placed by the university on being sensitive and responsive to a heartbreaking tragedy. The university demonstrated their sensitivity and compassion toward the families affected through their interactions with them by being mindful of the pain they were going through.

### **Pauline and collaborations/partnerships.**

With a crisis comes disruption of normalcy. Work, school and life is put on hold. Having established collaborations and partnerships with other educational institutions, schools and essential services is key to helping people especially children resume that sense of normalcy.

Pauline explained that the university worked closely with the other emergency agencies and the local schools:

I know that we did reach out to elementary schools in the area. Some of the children did finish off their year in local schools. ... Our emergency operations group works quite closely with the city's emergency group and with the province's emergency group, very tightly coordinated.

Pauline discussed her evaluation of the handling of this crisis by the university:

From the university's perspective, I think we handled it fairly well, we reacted quickly, we mobilized quickly. It's very trying for individuals ... not only did they have their

homes taken away, lots of them had their livelihood taken away, so that made it harder, and they were displaced for longer, which I think made it harder on the individuals. Could we have done more? Am not sure, everybody in the city stepped up to help out. ... I think the city was great at coordinating everybody. I mean I don't want to come across as smug because you can always learn little things, but I think overall ... people who stayed in residence were grateful to have, but they were all very stressed, I mean it's hard and its hard too if you get to a place and you are not sure where other members of your family are, that's extremely stressful. ... It's hard for kids to start a new school especially with the trauma that they have just come through, we packed lunches for kids that went off to school. ... We did try to be sensitive in terms of food and those sorts of comfort ... I just think it was a difficult situation for the evacuees.

Being prepared for a crisis include being ready for all unlikely possibilities that may occur. One of the ways to be prepared is by establishing those external relationships and collaborations that may become handy when needed as indicated by the response above.

In discussing the evaluation of the university's response to all three crises, the participant believed that the university did well. This belief was based on the quick response and mobilisation of resources to support the victims and evacuees.

#### **Pauline and crisis communication.**

The discussion turns to crisis communication. When a crisis occurs, the need to communicate is immediate. Higher education institutions must respond promptly, accurately and confidently during a crisis in the hours and days that follow. When asked what the institution did Pauline answered that the university relations were brilliant in how communication was handled:

I think ... [it] was brilliant in terms of managing that and the focus was always on care and concern for the families involved.

Pauline then spoke about the lessons learned from this crisis and the increased focus of the university on mental health. Pauline:

We do have a mental health strategy now. So, we focus more on mental health in terms of our students and faculty and staff. ... There was a growing indication for several years ...

that students were having more difficult coping with stress and other mental health issues...

Mental health has been a recurring theme in all the interviews, pointing to the importance of creating strategies to support students, faculty and staff.

### **Pauline and training.**

Training is essential to ensure that everyone knows what to do in the event of a crisis.

Pauline discussed the benefits of training and how training has helped her deal with crises issues on campus:

... The good thing is we do lots of training. We've done lots of tabletop exercises which are really good because they are facts situation you have to deal with and you learn a lot about what you should be doing and what you shouldn't be doing. Although, a real crisis is never what you trained on, it does give you a sense of what questions to ask, how to be open, it builds a real good team environment, so you understand where people are coming from and you can work together more effectively in a real crisis. It helps clarify the roles of CMT [crisis management team] and EOG [emergency operations group] in a tabletop exercise, which is just really beneficial, when there's a real crisis. I think doing tabletop exercises are quite useful, debriefing after them, debriefing after the real crisis very useful ... and change things as we ... incorporate lessons learned.

The discussion turned to the procedures and processes for handling crisis:

We have what we call the crises management team ... and we have an emergency operations group. The emergency operations group reports to the crisis management team. It gathers whatever information the crises management teams ask it to gather and then when we start on deciding on strategic direction, it starts implementing the strategy. There are people from all aspects of the university. ... In terms of the structure of the CMT [crisis management team] and the emergency operations group are very well-defined roles, great structure, clear reporting relationship, the chair of the CMT [crisis management team] keeps the president abreast of what is happening, so all of that is very clear, we have a meeting room set.

Crises can wreak havoc to educational institutions and create disruptions, therefore, having highly trained crisis leaders and emergency procedures can help in managing crisis situations. According the respondent, training provided the opportunities to build competencies

and collaborations as team members. It provided a way to learn and make mistakes and clarify roles and responsibilities.

### **Pauline and selfcare/mental healthcare.**

When asked what her selfcare and her mental health care was after the crisis, Pauline concludes her final thoughts by explaining that she did not reach out for help. Even though, there were various services available to staff:

We had lots of opportunity in terms of staff wellness and Employee Assistant Plan, I didn't reach out, I didn't feel like I needed to. ... You can reach out and they will provide counselling services and they have staff wellness as well here. ... I am a big believer in being active and exercise and all that kind of selfcare and then taking just some quite time, but it's so individual, it depends on what individuals need and when. Lots of times it's not immediately obvious to people that they need help, cause they are still processing or they are not really processing because you know they haven't real come to grips with the situation, it's you know is later down the road that they begin to process and I think individuals should do what they are comfortable doing but if its counselling, if it's taking some quiet time for themselves, if its exercising.

The type of self-care needed by participants is based on the individual. However, it is important for the individual to be self-aware and understand the necessary self-care he/she requires after responding to an emotional intense crisis.

### **Participant #5 Sheryl**

Sheryl is the vice president of university relations at the university and responsible for marketing, communications, government relations and community engagement for the university. Her portfolio includes the external relations functions as well as internal communications. She comes with many years of experience in handling media related crises. She is a buoyant and spiritual leader with a calm exterior. Her role within the crisis management team was to ensure effective and efficient internal and external communications in the university, stakeholder relations, and government relations.



### **Sheryl and prior crisis experiences.**

Asked about her prior experiences in crisis management, Sheryl replied:

I've been doing this kind of work for a very long time and prior to coming to the university ... I was at a university in Toronto and part of that in a senior leadership role at a Canadian radio station. An example of what I would have handled prior to entering postsecondary ... would be handling of national strikes ... this was a huge crisis communications management. We are the national broadcaster, and everything shuts down, we've got to have management covering the basic programming, we continue with news and other programming. You can imagine, this was huge, we have four national networks, television, radio, two official languages, we have eight aboriginal language networks across the north that are basic survival information. This would be one example of major event that, I suppose it wasn't a crisis because we knew it was coming but it ... was a big issue to manage on a national scale.

The competencies required of leaders in times of relative calm are distinct from the skill set required to effectively manage a crisis. Sheryl discussed what she believes are the competencies of a leader during a crisis:

I would say that first of all you have to be very calm in a crisis, so there can often be very high emotion. ... You have to be empathetic, understand the impact that these things have on people both inside and outside the organization, but you can't get caught up in the emotion of it. You need to be very calm, you're often dealing with people around you who are upset as they should be, you know if you are dealing with families. ... I think one of the most important skills in terms of doing this kind of work ... [is] the ability to triage very clearly and quite clinical, you know at a high strategic level what needs to be done and what can wait ... and you have to have the art of a long view and stay at a high level.

From the response gathered above, it is obvious that prior experience in crisis response and an understanding of the required competencies are important and a foundation to becoming an effective crisis leader.

### **Sheryl and the crisis of the flood.**

Every crisis influences behavior. We all react differently to crisis, especially, when it involves human lives and property. Sheryl talked about her reaction the flood:

I would say that it was a bit overwhelming, I remember when I first heard about it we were in the middle of the meeting, I remember we stopped the meeting and the president said we are hearing about floods in these three areas, if any one lives in these three areas, I suggest you leave now and so people did that and we monitored it. It was quite alarming ... at first you can't quite believe it and then you have to get pass that very quickly, because you have to put aside your feelings. You spend ten minutes on your feelings and then you focus and move forward.

When floods hit, people may be unprepared, especially in cities that are unlikely to get flooded and may need to be evacuated as quickly as possible. One of the things a university can do in situations like this is provide some form of support to the community. Sheryl discussed the importance of supporting the community in times like this:

... Our position was, we are here to support our community and ... that means our university community but also the broader ... community. ... There was no real question, of course, we are going to do that, right, that's a principle of being an anchoring institution, and being a leader in our community and wanting to do everything we can to support our community. ... It was never a question, it was very quickly, how do we do that?

In a crisis, leaders are keenly aware of the potentially devastating impact the crisis makes on people, therefore their personal reactions are momentary as they suppress their own feelings and focus on providing support for the community. Support for the community both in the acute phase of crisis management and during the aftermath can take many different forms such housing, food and financial. The university established itself as a major ally to the community, thereby showing leadership.

### **Sheryl and the murders of several university students.**

Murder is one of the toughest types of crisis to manage and is a traumatic situation.

Sheryl talked about her initial reaction to the news of the murders of several young students:

It was horrific, it was absolutely horrific, I don't know what else to say, it was just horrific and your heart just goes out to the families, to the student community, to their

friends, it was just horrific, you never ever want to hear about this kind of thing happening anywhere let alone in your own backyard, right, it was awful.

Sheryl talked about her experiences in this crisis:

This was a tough one ... you really should be working so closely with the ... police and with the families of the victims. ... You have to be sensitive and so much of what you do in terms of communication is governed by both the police investigation and by the wishes of the families and those two things are just so paramount to doing crisis communication in this kind of situation. ... We felt it was so important to very very very quickly bring our campus community together, the mayor came to speak, the president spoke, and it was such a difficult day. ... We dealt with the initial communications and management of information that was going out, dealing with the families and dealing with the police, we then wanted to do a very major celebration of life for the students and that became a huge part of our work as you can imagine how sensitive that was and how sensitively it had to be handled. ... I remember us having to work with other universities because two of the students were from [different universities] and so we then had to liaison and coordinate with the universities, then we had to bring in key government people, who were speaking and working with families. It was very tough, but I was so proud of the teams across the whole institution, and the students experience team under ... the vice provost student experience ... was just so awesome dealing with the families, it was really difficult.

Every crisis recovery process manifest tension between speed and deliberation. No matter how horrific the crisis is, recovery is important to enable victims and survivors return to some form of normalcy. Students and staff exposed to traumatic crisis events need to be supported, if not, there would some long-term negative effect which may affect other aspects of their lives. External resources such as a counsellor, a psychiatrist, or a therapist may be brought in to further extend the support survivors receive.

### **Sheryl and collaborations/partnerships.**

No institution is any island. Collaboration is a necessary foundation for dealing with all kinds of crises. Sheryl talked about the collaboration between several agencies and the university:

... When we opened up our residences to ... evacuees, we were working with the school boards because families came ... to make sure the children who came into our residences had school placements. ... There's tremendous collaboration between the city, the city's emergency management agency, the province, the police, the fire department, and the provincial emergency management group. We work totally collaboratively with them and that's the only way you can do emergency management, you cannot be at a corner.

Because crises are sudden, and decisions may be made quickly in crisis response, an evaluation of the effectiveness of crisis response is important. According to Sheryl's evaluation, the university handled the crisis effectively:

Honestly, I think they were effectively handled, I think we did a good job, there is always learnings, I think overall, we did a good job. ... I think one of the learnings out of that was, how do you balance the importance of continuing your academic mission at the same time that you are managing a crisis? There was a lot of bumpy conversations at the beginning. ... I am confident we ended up in the right place and it all worked out. ... There were really learnings about that how we all came together, and, in the end, we got to the right place but that was a really learning.

I asked Sheryl to explain some of the learnings that occurred:

I think we learned that we really need to take the time to sit down and have conversations. One of the things that's challenging in an emergency is that there is so much to be done so quickly, because you want to be responsive, but I think sometimes you have to say hold on ... say stop, we all need to come together in one room not email, and actually have some conversations about this and just slow that for a minute. So, that was a learning.

Collaborations and evaluations of crises response are two vital components of effective crisis management. A university's ability to collaborate and create effective partnerships with external agencies is fundamental to a successful crisis management, because no one institution has all the resources and answers. After the crisis comes recovery and learnings, it is important to ask the difficult questions of "what could we have done better?" "How did we perform?" in order to prepare for the next crisis.

### **Sheryl and crisis communication.**

Many different audiences must be reached with information specific to their interests and needs during a crisis. The basic steps of effective crisis communications are not difficult, but they require advance work to minimize damage. In a murder situation, crisis communication must be sensitive and intentional. Sheryl disclosed what she considers during these difficult times as a crisis communications leader:

You have to consider what direction you are getting from the police, you have to be very clear some of these is not our decision, it's the police decision, we take direction from them. You have to be very clear what the family wishes are, and you need to hear from both of those before you can develop your communications plan. We would get swamped with request, for example, do you know the name of the person, well, until the families and the police say yes, you can identify the person, we do not identify the person. ... If every student on campus is twitting the name, we will not confirm it until the families say we can confirm it and the police say we can confirm it. This has become much more complicated because of the age of social media, because twenty years ago there was no way for people to communicate this widely, but now you have to really understand that no matter how much pressure you are under, you respect the families wishes and you respect the direction of the police and so, really important principle if you have communications around anything like this.

When asked how she managed the media, television and radio stations during this time, Sheryl explained:

You have a spokesperson who does that. ... If it's a major tragedy of the institution, it will always be your president ...

Sheryl continued as she talked about the learnings from this crisis:

I think what I learned was how important it is to have a really strong plan in place. ... We had learnings of the flood in terms of speed of communication, delivery, management of stakeholders, we did a complete debrief, and we took those lessons into the ... tragedy and so, I would say that out of that we learned that the relationship with the student experience office internally was absolutely so critical and we really deepened that relationship. We took out of that some learnings and some changes with how we work with that office around student's death, students' suicide and that's something we've now worked into our ongoing communications.

Crisis communication leaders strive hard to overcome tough situations and help the organization come out of difficult situations in the best possible and quickest way. As well as apply the right communication tools to improve crisis communications. Sheryl described some crisis communication tools employed by the university:

One of the things that we did before these crises and we have refined them over the years is to have an emergency app ... because you need to get to people as quickly as you possibly can. We developed a whole emergency app program here at the university that did not exist before and that was really important to be able to get the word out to people. ... You are also putting out emails, which is more for faculty and staff because students don't usually read emails and then the website. The mobile app and the website are the two most single most important communications vehicles because everyone goes to the website and everyone looks at their phones that where people live when they use information right, so you have to be providing that information.

Effective crisis communication begins with honesty and transparency with the priority to protect the campus community using all available communication tools. These communication tools are varied and may be effective depending on how the institution uses them. The conversation with the participant revealed that communication was collaborative between the police and the university. This type of collaborative partnership can often lead to a deepening of relationships as each unit begins to understand that they are both allies doing the best they can through communication in a difficult situation.

### **Sheryl and training.**

It is important to prepare and train for a crisis in any organization. Everyone needs to understand and fully execute their roles when it comes to crisis management and be as crisis-ready as possible. Sheryl disclosed that the university's has emergency plans in place and why it was necessary to have these plans:

I would say we have very robust crises plans and crises management procedures and we've worked very very hard on them over the last five/six years and I would say that we are very good at this now. ... It's an area we have put a tremendous amount of time and effort into because we feel it's very important for our campus community and the broader community that when there is a crisis we are completely ready to go. It's also critical for our reputation, so it's about support for our community, supporting our broader community and also its critical in terms of reputation management that when there is a crisis, we are not only on top of it but seen to be on top of it and managing appropriately and in an empathetic way.

Sheryl then discussed her thoughts on training and preparation, highlighting the importance of crisis preparation.

... I would say that the training is adequate, you know, it's a tough question because it's almost never enough, but in crisis management, you have to balance how much is enough. So, I would say that if we are doing active review of our crisis communications plan within university relations twice a year and we have tabletops twice a year that's adequate. Sometimes we are doing it a little less and I think we actually need to be very rigorous about doing it twice a year and I think that is adequate.

Formal crisis training can contribute to a successful crisis response. The institution understands how critical training is for leaders and has made crisis training a priority with extensive training sessions taking place. The participant is overall satisfied with the level of training she has received. One wonders if training for crisis management is ever enough.

### **Sheryl and self-care/mental healthcare.**

When asked about self-care and mental healthcare during a crisis, Sheryl revealed not being very good at self-care. She worried about her team in this regard and talked about some of her learnings as she concludes the discussion:

I would say we are probably not as good at that as we should be, you are right, because am thinking, how do I make my team on the ground get turned over and they get adequate care and rest for themselves. ... We probably don't spend enough time thinking about how to look after ourselves. One of the learnings out of the first one which was the flood was that we needed more senior level backup because it went on for a very long time. ... We needed to train that backup, so that these two people could switch back and forth ... if I needed to take myself out for any length of time.

Leaders rarely seek support and self-care for themselves often focusing on the needs of others. If leaders do not take care of themselves, they become susceptible to burnouts and high stress levels. Sheryl recognized the need for self-care but as other leaders, she was more concerned about others than herself.

### **Participant #6 Andy**

Andy is a member of the university's senior leadership team. His portfolio is responsible for planning, designing, project management of capital projects, real-estate, and maintaining the university's physical assets, whether that be a building or open space. In addition, he works directly with the Provost's office in a shared leadership and oversight of the Office of Sustainability. He actively participates and provides information and advice based on his personal experience within the university context. He often leans on his past professional experience and community outreach roles bring all these experiences and knowledge to the table.

#### **Andy and prior crisis experiences.**

Most of Andy's crisis management experiences are in the construction world, which is his background. He discussed his prior experiences, giving examples:

A majority of my experiences, as it relates to ... crises is in the construction world. For example, in one project, there were very tight tolerances for building settlements and so as one aspect of the project proceeded, we did have a building settle beyond our tolerance and we had to stop that work and deal with the issues in a way that mitigated the risk but allowed the project to continue advancing as quickly as possible.

I was also directly involved in the active shooter incident on my [former] campus. While no university community members were the target, a third-party service provider had one of their employees shoot two of their other employees and made off with some money. While it was a very external incident, it happened in the university building ... So, those were probably two of the big ones I have dealt with, there were smaller ones, but those were the two big ones.



Institutions will encounter crises at some point in their existence and having crisis leaders with prior experiences can help reduce the impact of such crises. Andy comes with experience in construction and managing university facilities. His prior crisis experience has influenced his thinking about crisis management.

### **Andy and the competencies of a crisis leader.**

Leaders who enable their organizations recover from a crisis exhibit a complex set of competencies. I was interested in knowing what these competencies were as I discussed with Andy:

I think you have to be calm in the moment and not allow emotions, speculation and worry to drive decisions. I think it's very easy to over reach and over protect in an attempt to stop the hurt or stop the bleeding or whatever is hemorrhaging and then the other piece is the ... I call it the Florence nightingale effect ... where you want to heal everything and everyone and you just have to really understand what your limits are and what you are capable of doing and really create that balanced approach to it and clearly articulate if you can't do something, and why you can't do it. I think effective communication is probably the third piece.

When asked if he demonstrated any of the competencies, Andy elaborated:

I believe that I need to act as that bridge, so once actions are determined, it's our operational teams that implements it and so being a bit removed from that emotion allows me to ask a what if question or just take the time to pause because we as CMT [crisis management team] members are very rarely in that direct line of exposure of an event. ... It allows me then to take myself away from the fenced issue and start looking at the some of the periphery, some of the secondary and tertiary effects that maybe our decisions may make that others may not see because they are focused in trying to fix the problem without realization of doing something else downstream that may have greater consequences. So, I think that that's what I try to demonstrate and just stay calm and not get personally engaged necessarily in the decisions, realizing it's a collective decision.

Some of the key competencies emphasized by this participant were calmness, being effective and understanding your limits as a crisis leader. He engages in a sense of detachment to enable him to gain a deeper and more objective perspective during a crisis.

### **Andy and the crisis of the wildfire.**

Andy's initial reaction to the crisis of the fire, was that of care and concern for the families:

My initial reaction was probably more ... just care and concern for those individuals, and where they were going to be, ... no place to live, families with young kids, middle of the school term.

The fire had displaced people from their homes as they fled for their lives. These families became refugees seeking refuge and a place to relocate their families. The university stepped up to house the families but as Andy recalled the logistics posed some concerns for the university.

Andy explained:

... The provincial entity called the university ... asked if we would be willing to take some refugees and if so, how many? So that's when we first heard about it ... and then it just kept getting bigger and bigger and before we knew it, it became a crisis, as it was starting to interfere with other existing institutional programs and commitments we had on campus. With people coming in and staying in our residences to attend conferences and events, same time we had a major humanities conference at the campus. That was probably the biggest conflict in there ... this was all about human comfort ... at one point, we really needed like three hundred beds ... and then it grew to like I don't know what it was, the final bed count about 1500 an unimaginable number. ... As they [the evacuees] were coming in, [we said] here is your room key, ... daycare for kids, pets that came, you know, hamsters, ferrets, dogs, cats. [Another] issue was we never had a firm end date [to move out the evacuees], we were trying to manage this provincial need against the starting of our fall term and needing to make space for incoming students with secured residence spots. How do you kick people out of a university? ... And they have nowhere to go and so a lot of those conversations occurred at the university with the provincial government and our provincial response team to ensure that humanity wasn't lost in the process that was a really important decision we made as an institution that these individuals had to be treated at a level of humanity that brought comfort and stability to them in very trying times.

A university is an important asset that can be a valuable source of support for the community as they have substantial residential facilities. However, a challenge faced by any university would be finding a balance between the university's culture of support and

compassion versus institutional programs and commitments during the hosting of evacuees. As expressed by this participant, there was struggle between providing housing and when to reclaim back residences. In these types of situations, it is advisable to create an atmosphere where deep and engaging conversations can be had to determine the way forward.

### **Andy and collaborations/partnerships.**

The discussion turned to partnerships and collaborations during a crisis. Andy discussed the different levels of collaborations that occurred both internally within the university and externally with other partners. Internal collaborations:

... Nursing, social work, vet med definitely the big three that were involved in that from a faculty perspective to just really assist in some of that. Psychology may have been engaged in some of the hardship cases that came in. ... We have experts in every field and they reached out ... building that sense of community ...

In discussing external collaborations, Andy highlighted some issues around relocating guests who were in residence at the campus for a conference. In addition there were communication challenges that occurred between the management team and the team on ground working with the evacuees:

... At the eleventh hour the province basically said state of emergency, we need more beds and that information didn't come quickly to the [crisis management team] table ... so a lot of credit to the individuals that were working in real time but that gap created some strain, well "why did you make this decision?" because that was the assumption "Why did you make this decision to free up some beds" because we were told, "why did you tell you us you were told" and we discussed well "can we actually tell them no", like, we appreciate the state of emergency but we aren't the only beds, you know, ... but because it was happening so quickly, we just quickly called less around the strategy, said okay go off and find solutions and bring them back to the [crisis management team] table and then it got back on track. That's just the issue with real time, when you make an assumption you did something as opposed to I am responding, that grace that is needed there, it's just going to happen in a crises you are emotionally charged you get caught off guard, sometimes time and space doesn't allow and ... so there could have been a better cascading of information.

With providing accommodation for evacuees comes the problem of funding. Who funds the extra cost incurred by the university? Andy elaborated on the situation:

We tracked all the cost and gave the cost to the province, as soon as we have an issue like this, we set up an account code. ... We make sure that we track every cost so the EOG [emergence operations group] knows the account code number, all the costs get allocated to it, all are categorized in our system ... and so it makes it really easy for us to reconcile the additionally effort.

Andy discussed the effective handling of this crisis, he expounded on what he felt were some areas for improvement:

I think we did [well], just more proactively and timely communication and cascading across the CMT [crisis management team], realizing that sometimes you don't need everyone at [crisis management team] the table to make decisions but everyone at the [crisis management team] table should be aware of the issue and the decisions that was made and not have to wait to the next CMT [crisis management team] and playing catch up because you are wondering, well, why wasn't I engaged, did I say something, am I not valued, you get a lot of self-doubt and then you actually aren't engaging in the first half hour of the table because you are self-reflecting as opposed to focusing on the issue. So I think that's probably the one thing that could be done differently and ... because of that we did set up different kinds of protocol and we remind ourselves, remember during the fire when we didn't do this and so whether its table top exercises or whatever we do, it's now front and center because we do a disservice to our colleagues when we operate in a vacuum.

Internal collaborations between faculties in a university can be mutually beneficial and create community engagement as well as foster deeper relationships. The participant expressed confusion in communication as a factor that created self-doubt and self-reflection to what his value was on the team.

### **Andy and the murders of several university students.**

Trauma and pain are inflicted upon families. Murder is one of the hardest types of crisis to respond to. Andy shared some of his thoughts during the response process:

Again, probably the same as the fires because it was off campus and so it wasn't targeted at the university, because of my history with active shooting and it was somewhat

contained quickly. We were able to quickly move into a response to the situation as opposed to is there something more nefarious going on, that was squashed really quick, we didn't even know if there were university students involved, we just knew it happened near the university, ... three of the five victims were university students. So, it was really about moving into connecting with the families of the university students first and foremost and how do we support our community who knew the victims? And then thirdly how do we support the broader community? ... Like I said at the very beginning we didn't over react, we didn't speculate, no one thought "oh is he coming back to our campus, we have to seal the campus, we have to get police", those thoughts were, if they came up, no, no that's silly, it was quickly put aside and we stayed with the facts of the situation and waited to understand who were the victims, where were they, was this targeted, was it random, and those sort of things.

Quick response and ways to connect with the families of this tragic crisis were some of the ways the university intervened in this crisis. Andy's prior crisis experience came to bear as he responded with the crisis management team. This points to the significance of prior crisis response experiences as an important competency in crisis leadership and management.

#### **Andy and crisis communication.**

As the discussion progressed, we turned to crisis communication. It is important that an institution respond promptly, accurately and confidently during an emergency in the hours and days that follow. Andy talked about the different modes of communication explored by the university and the collaborations with units of the university to provide accurate and meaningful information to all parties:

We certainly used twitter, and targeted ... stories, emails to faculty, staff and students. Where to get mental health if they needed it, the deferral process, and a great job by our university relations shop. ... Just a brilliant job, we actually brought her into the CMT [crisis management team] table because this was so student centric to provide updates, reports and give us some real time feedback on our thinking to see if this makes sense from the student culture perspective and she was the front center of the mental health strategy.

I think they [communication tools] were used effectively. I do think a lot of external people feel they were not used effectively, well, we need to have more information, the cleaner the quicker, sometimes in this day and age of instantaneous knowledge the last

thing you want to be accused of is putting out information that's wrong or could put people at harm and especially and active shooter you don't have control. Your command and control is arguable the city police and they tell you when you can or cannot say stuff, and they need time to assess. ... So, I think us getting out the message the university is safe was a critical message to get out quick and as we know more, we will let you know. It was really a good strong cadence to it, like I said in those concentric circles, the family of the victims, friends, and families of the affected and then the university community, so I think it was really an effective way of doing it.

After every crisis, there should come a time of revision and evaluation of the crisis response and management. Andy reflected on the importance of creating value and connecting with the communities in times of crisis as he evaluated the university's crisis response.

... I think the team really came together and again because it was a different kind of crisis, there was no immediate danger to the university, it really allowed us to be thoughtfully and pragmatic about our approach to this situation which will arguably change the postsecondary sector for years to come and the question is where is our footnote in that history in terms of reputational building or our value propositions. ... While none of these events occurred on our campuses, all are strongly rooted in our pillar of connecting with communities. I think we are trusted as an institution to do that which puts a lot of pressure on executive to ensure that we are staying true to those tenets and we are not resting on our laurels, we are constantly coming in with that sense of community and just human compassion and it's a great attribute this university has.

The significance of employing various communication tools to provide students, faculty and staff with resources was a thoughtful and pragmatic decision made by the university. This decision underlined the importance of communicating to encourage recovery during a crisis. In addition, bringing in a strategic partner from the university relations unit was tactical, as the expertise of this individual repositioned the university in terms of reputational management.

### **Andy and training.**

Andy then reflected upon the training he has received to handle crises encountered by the university. He discussed the difficulty of evacuating a campus during a crisis and the emergency

procedures in place for crisis management. He then pointed out the importance of updating emergency plans and the training:

I think to the best of our abilities, plans are in place, but there are some areas that could continue to be further developed and detailed. I think that when we look at the need to evacuate our campus that that is something that's hard to do in crisis and I've been at other universities where when you do table top exercises, the initial reaction is okay we need to vacate the campus, because usually table top exercises they are huge and you are getting hit with stuff and before you know it, I've got a fire here, I've got an explosion, now I've got toxic fumes and the winds are blowing them into the heart of campus, what do we do? And so again on that side of do no harm, its evacuate the campus, how do you evacuate 40,000 people, when there could be no transit, there could be no buses, you can't bring buses to the campus that is being evacuated, are police in the area, I think we know the triggers to create an evacuation, am not sure if we actually have an evacuation plan for the campus, we have muster points, we've got alternate muster points, every faculty has emergency response plan to ensure that credibility. Our physical plant, our heating cooling plant, cogent facilities all have plans. If something goes wrong there, a power outage, like ... winter storms where almost all ... were blacked, we remained fully operational.

He continued as he emphasized the importance of keeping track of all crisis management procedures and conducting a crisis response postmortem:

... From the flood, I'm not sure what transpired with the housing that was on campus, but ... you need that postmortem so you can actually chronicle what you did and evaluate, could you have done it better, then use that, so that you now have a binder you can refer to and say let's implement the flood mitigation plan, let's implement the ... communication strategy and so if we start tracking these things as they come then we aren't recreating and then all we have to do is just say are the parameters the same? If the parameters are the same then you can go forth and use it, if they aren't then you can proactively look oh these are different, will this new information change what we did and then at least you are not starting from square one, I think that's where probably where a lot of stuff is lost, you do it and do it well you talk about what we could have done better but then no one really captures it in a standard form that can be used in the next situation, you really rely on institutional memory and our president is leaving in seven weeks, that institutional memory is going to be lost at the leadership table, so we need to find a way to capture these things not in real time but capture them soon after the event is closed.

Andy continued talking about the importance of keeping the university emergency response manual updated or replaced.

... I think looking at what's in place, it's just the perseverance to update them, without seeing updated ERMs [emergency response manuals] or without a schedule of ERMs being reviewed and/or replaced that people are held accountable to, it's sort of a one and done and I think just that process of revisiting, on an annual basis, your ERMs and the having them signed off, is good practice. If you have new people, it's a great point to onboard new individuals that may not have been there for the writing and thankful they didn't have to implement it and it allows you to get front line staff engaged, so I think more work could be done on that to have more of a formal sign off and if it does exist the sign offs are reported.

Evaluations and learnings are part of the process of crisis management as discussed in chapter two. The opportunity to provide feedback, update and document learnings can prevent the occurrences of past mistakes in the next crisis. This is a process of continual onward improvement. Accountability and perseverance in updating the emergency response manuals points to the factors that the interviewee found important for the crisis recovery phase.

#### **Andy and self-care/mental healthcare.**

The discussion turned to self-care and mental health during and after a crisis. Andy indicated that he did not reach out for support, because he has a personal support network:

I didn't reach out to get external support. I've got a great personal support network and because none of the stuff was confidential all of it was very public and I think for me because none of these [crises] were personal ... it was just about reconciling the grief of many and just coming to terms that although I wasn't directly impacted, the people I worked with were impacted and had empathy for them. That can become quite overwhelming because you are hearing all the stories, you need to sort of let it out to someone. I've got a great external network that provides that support to me and I lean on those three individuals heavily at times like these. I don't know how you can do it without it and if I didn't have those three individuals, I probably would have reached out to a stranger but if I don't have to talk to a stranger I wouldn't. But I know the support was there though, it was offered, support services at the university were around, we were all remind of it, if you need it take it, if you need time off, days off, just let us know.

He concludes the discussion on the need to get support if needed and the disadvantage of not getting support:



I think the university as a whole has such a great social network piece, they have to in order to support the students and support faculty, you almost have a bounty of opportunities depending where your piece is at. For me, it might just be, how do I as a leader create calm if my team was getting anxious and that has never happened, even the active shooter incident, my job, I felt was really to ensure that the people that were on the front line got the support they needed, ... and they got to hear it from me that you may feel that you need to but at least make one conversation with one individual and then go from there. I didn't need it personally but I thought it was important for me to relay that message, that if you are feeling different, overly happy, overly sad, overly melancholy, just talk to one person for one hour about what's on your mind and then from there you will know whether, you can judge whether you've opened up something that you were either suppressing or you were over compensating for and you just can't deal with. Sometimes almost forcing to have that conversation creates the sense of realization because sometimes we just go into that protect mode the worst that can happen is 4 or 5 months later something happens, and you don't know why, it's because you didn't deal with the event back here. I think that early intervention, at the end of the day you can't force someone to do it , so you've got to create a pathway for that individual to seek and then some people don't just respond that way, they have the ability to compartmentalize in order to continue to move forward but you have to watch that because that can lead to a whole series of psychological and sociological issues moving forward, so if it's a coping mechanism that fine but if it becomes the crutch and God forbid that crutch cracks and it becomes a sticky situation.

In his lived experience of being a crisis leader, Andy understands the importance of support. Although the university provided various resources for support, Andy's response indicates that leaders were prone to not use those supports. Crisis leaders may not always realize that a crisis especially an emotional intense crisis may leave deep emotionally scars they may be not be aware of, thereby making them more susceptible and vulnerable to PTSD. These leaders may end up paying high personal costs. An encouragement from a colleague, and top administrators may enable crisis leaders seek support.

### **Participant #7 Martha**

Martha is the associate vice president for the risk portfolio at her university. This portfolio includes campus security, environment health and safety, emergency management, insurance and risk management, enterprise risk management and staff wellness at the university.

She has a vibrant and welcoming personality. Martha described her role in the crisis management team “as a little bit of air traffic control,” she makes sure that all logistics for crisis management are handled effectively. She is involved in policy development, such as the cannabis and alcohol policy. She is also involved in program development and compliance work with provincial and federal standards, for instance environment health and safety, and staff wellness.

### **Martha and prior crisis experiences.**

Martha gave a general explanation of her experiences:

So, those ones [flood, fire and murders] were three big ones that we managed on campus, as you can imagine. We’ve done a lot of smaller scale ones; those ones were all activations of our emergency operations group. We’ve done other activations of our EOG [emergence operations group], we had power outages, where we activated the EOG. We’ve done work at the CMT [crisis management team] table around things like campus activism, and some student issues have resulted in the activation of the crisis management team. On top of that we handle [crisis of all types and kinds] ... on-campus student suicide, we handle those kinds of on-campus crises ...

All institutions have different types of crises. What sets a crisis leader apart in these situations is how those crises are dealt with. The ability to deal with different types of crises lends to one’s experience and expertise in handling more difficult situations like suicides. From the above narrative, Martha seemed to have gained experience from responding to all kinds of crises.

### **Martha and competencies of a crisis leader.**

Crisis provides opportunities for leaders to draw on their past experiences as they develop crisis leadership competencies. When asked to describe the competencies of a crisis leader, Martha highlights the ability to process information, collaborate, listen and create trust as important competencies:

I think you have to be a collaborator for sure, you have to be a good listener. There is such much information coming in during a crisis, you have to be able to listen and process a lot of information. I think you also have to be able to ask the hard and good questions as well. But I do think that you also need to have sort of a deep understanding of the university operations and I think that that's the only way you can really start to connect the dots because every time we have a crisis on campus, it always involves more people than you anticipate and so you have to be able to connect the dots, know who the right person is to talk to, for either information up or your information down and I guess just having a really deep knowledge of the institution is really beneficial and unfortunately, it seems to me that experience in these kinds of crises is really helpful. You know my first few years in this role, everything was a bit of an eye opener and now that I have been here for five years, it feels like most circumstances that we encounter now, unfortunately, we've dealt with before and so we are getting to be a bit of a well-oiled machine to manage these kinds of crises and I would say that we do it better now than we have historically as a result. ... I think it's being able to make decisions, sometimes in a crisis you have to make the best decision with the information you have at the time. Sometimes, it's about making those decisions, and then not being afraid to say, ok, we need to change directions now because we have more information, because when information is coming in, ... so not being afraid to go down one path and then come back and re-evaluate ... I think the other thing is, you have to be trusted, and leadership is all about trust and I am surrounded by a team right now that I trust my life with and so being trusted and having trust in your people is really critical in a crisis and I think also now being here for four -five years and managing this unique portfolio, I think I have some trust that has been built outside of my portfolio so that I can reach out and get the information I need. I think trust is very important, yes foundational for sure.

The ability to collaborate, be a good listener, have good questioning techniques, prior experience and deep knowledge of institutional processes are some of the competencies highlighted by Martha. A crisis can be a high-pressure situation that heightens anxiety, universities that are enabled to recover from this high-pressure situation will most likely have leaders who exhibit a set of competencies. These competencies can provide leaders with the proper tools to navigate the crisis.

### **Martha and the crisis of the flood.**

Martha moved on to the crisis of the flood and the first steps taken as crisis response began:

So, I actually was at home, when I first heard about the flood and I was like okay, am I allowed to be on the roads? Because of course they were talking about staying off the roads, because of emergency vehicles, then I think the first phone calls were probably with university relations, because there were some decisions that needed to be made at the crisis management team level, we came in, the crises management team, I think we must have the EOG [emergence operations group] and CMT [crisis management team] right about the same time.

The discussion progressed to crisis management and evacuees during the flood, Martha explained:

So, CMT [crisis management team] made the decision to close the campus and the EOG [emergency operations group] was activated to get the operational pieces in place, I mean it was everything from having to inform researchers that they can't come into campus, if they've got experiments running, how they were going to manage those, how we going to manage our animals, feeding, and cage cleaning and all those kinds of things for a campus closed in. We've never closed the campus, I think we closed it for one day during a winter storm a few years ago, but this is the first time we've closed the campus like that, so it was a bit of a learning curve for us. So, then it was really sort figuring out, who are the essentially services, who needs to be here, who doesn't need to be here, who is scheduled to come to campus. ... How we managed those and cancelled those events was a big deal and that was the start of the flood.

Martha continued:

So, then what it became was, someone in residence got a phone call and said we've got some evacuees, can you take them, and they said yes without connecting back to the emergency management group. So, suddenly we had a population on our campus, we didn't even know was showing up and then it became about managing the demographic that showed.

Martha discussed what the university might have done differently:

I would suggest we would do it very differently, in fact we did very differently for the ... fire. What we have asked now is when [the city's] emergency management agency is sending us evacuees, we need to know what supports they need, because we were not prepared, and we could probably take some of those people who require supports, but we weren't prepared with support for the first set of evacuees. Now the question is before we accept evacuees, we're asking, what kind of supports do we need to have here for them so we can provide them a safe place to be. ... That was a big learning for us, and we have defiantly learned from that experience.

The begins of a crisis can cause trepidation and uncertainty. Communication, effective strategy and actions can quickly convey to stakeholders that their safety is paramount. The participant identified the challenges faced in dealing with the crisis as the university became impacted. In order to prevent the crisis from overwhelming the university, critical decisions in the areas of logistics and strategy are required.

### **Martha and the crisis of the wildfire.**

The conversation then turned to the crisis of the wildfire, Martha recalled feeling sad. She talked about preparing to receive evacuees:

Personally, I couldn't believe it watching the videos, I couldn't believe watching the forces that were engaged to start the evacuation, I was sort of sad thinking, you know, that it got that close and then of course I knew that we were going to be looking to take some evacuees. I was also starting to mobilize our people, to say what have got in residence. In fact, we now have a very clean, process with our residence services folks, who are fantastic, and they will send us regular updates and availability, because we know we will have to at some point, if we've got space in our residence to take evacuees for whatever reason even the building downtown.

As the evacuees relocated to the city and campus residences, Martha met with her director of emergency to plan:

... The first thing my director of emergency and I did was talk a little bit about how we wanted this to unfold because what we learned in the floods was that we could operationalized this if we had a smoother system and so what we did for this one. Of course, we sat with the crisis management team because they ultimately make the decision whether we are taking in evacuees. This one got slightly complicated as I alluded to it earlier because we had the conference here on campus and the conference was booked into our some of residents' rooms, initially, we were told we were only going to have evacuees for a short period of time of course that's not what happened and we fluctuated in the numbers we were getting, we were told a smaller number, eventually we ended up with 1400, we even had backup space on our of gyms ready with cots. we were much better prepared this time, and what we opt to do this time was instead of activating our emergency operations group, we simply called it an operational exercise and we used an incident command system in residence and we simply mobilized it that way instead.

Next, Martha talked about the learnings from the crisis response during the wildfire:

That one I think was much more effectively run, it was smoother, we had the right resources at the right time set up for that we had some challenges in there, we had Ramadan, which was challenging, you know you always learn from these things how to do it better and effectively. Part of it too was communicating, we had some issues with communication, one of our biggest issues was actually the fact that the province gave us a drop dead date to have all the evacuees out because they would not pay for evacuees after a certain date, but they were not willing to put their name on the bottom of the letter that was being sent out to the evacuees to say you needed to be out on this date. So, we had a few challenges like that, that weren't pleasant at the time, but I think we learned from. If you were a person who was on our campus at that period time, I would suggest you wouldn't even see a hiccup, when we introduced 1400 evacuees into rez [residence]. I just think it was pretty smooth, could we do better, always, right rooms for the right people, we ran into a couple of things around IT [information technology]. The other issue that we ran into and that happened in the flood too, are people who are generous and thoughtful, they cause another crisis with donations, so donations become another issue, right, we were always trying to prompt people to go to Red Cross to make a financial donation instead of bringing diapers, blankets and clothes. It's the same that happened during the flood, it became another mini crisis for our campus to manage because where are you going to put it all?

As identified by literature there is no one size fits all in organizational planning, rather crisis planning should be based on the organization's characteristics and context (Stern, 2013).

The university engaged in consultations to design a strategy that best suited the crisis of the flood and hosting evacuees. Different capabilities and resources were deployed by the university in novel and creative ways given the propensity for unanticipated problems in a crisis (Stern, 2013).

### **Martha and collaborations/partnerships.**

Collaboration in campus settings is an important element. Generally, emergency response involves collaborating with multiple agencies and faculties within and outside the campus, with each having different views, protocols and priorities. These agencies and faculties must act together to handle the situation. Martha elaborated on how these multiple agencies and faculties collaborated:

... [The city's] emergency management agency, ... we are tight like this, in fact, ... we have a seat for postsecondary institutions in their EOG [emergency operations group], so

when an emergency happens, its ... usually ... my director of emergency management who sits in there. ... We work incredibly close with them, in fact this is where our model is so amazing in the city ... we then have one point of contact for decision making, for evacuees, for facilitating assistance from the Red Cross, it all goes through ... [the city's] emergency management agency. What happened in the fires is that [the provincial agency] they just don't have that same experience and they don't have the same procedures and so as you may have heard, it became a bit of a nightmare, in terms of managing. So, when I was tracking, for instance, am required to track, in fact my director of risk management insurance is also the section chief for their financial section in their EOG [emergency operations group], so when we track our number of evacuees because of course we were compensated, during the flood it was nice and easy because we could track for ... [the city's] emergency management agency, during the fires it became a bit of a nightmare because [the provincial agency] was not sure what they needed, they changed their mind, it was very challenging because they don't have a structure in place like ... [the city's] emergency management agency, that is very clear. Yes, so we work very closely with ... [the city's] emergency management agency, in fact they just gave us an award. We do an annual emergency warden sort of thank you.

She continued talking about internal collaborations with other faculties within the campus:

... It was a bit of a nice collaboration again. We tried to work with our good friends at [other universities] as well, so we can share some resources, in fact, we got better at this during the fires, for instance our Vet Med folks went to all of the evacuation locations and managed all the animal needs there. So, we got better at sort even sharing resources and figuring out how we could move people around to make the best use of the resources. ... Again, my folks are amazing, and our campus community is amazing. So, when we needed social work and nursing to help us they stepped up, they are amazing, same with Vet Med and medicine, with Kinesiology, just our volunteer group on campus are phenomenal, you know, that's one thing that we sometimes forget as an institution is to use our faculty. We needed translators, ... we have all those resources at our finger tips, right here on campus, we just need to have our arms wrapped around who those people are, so we can reach out at the right time.

Responses to crisis are enhanced by thorough and effective collaboration (Spellings, Price & Modzeleski, 2009). Martha identified that the university was proactive in creating established and trustworthy relationships with their external partners and other faculties prior to a

crisis happening. This demonstrates how important meaningful collaborations can enhance effective crisis response within the university community.

### **Martha and the murders of several university students.**

Martha heard about the deaths of several young students early in the morning. She went into crisis management mode as she made several phone calls that morning:

So, I heard about it at about quarter after five in the morning, I was up watching the news and I went ... those are our kids! So, here's what happens the last day of class on campus, we have something ... and I always sort of breath the sigh of relief at about midnight ... because it is sort of when things calm down again for us, and campus security, for them to wake up at 5 o'clock in the morning to hear this. The first thing I did was to phone university relations and say, those are our kids ... and that prompted a whole set of phone calls and then I got my car and drove here because I knew the crises management team was meeting that morning and then I have to say, I start balling, those are my kids, they belong in our campus, those are our children, it was a very sad time, very sad time. The crises management team was activated, ... [and] our president ... hosted on that day the memorial service here, she is the spokesperson for the university, so we leave her out of the CMT [crisis management team].

Martha continued talking about how the university handled this painful and challenging crisis:

Part of our challenge was that we can't release names until the ... police releases names, they got to notify the next of kin, there's a lot of the procedural stuff that needs to happen, so that was a little bit challenging for us, just in terms of providing support. So part of what we do on campus is to provide support not just to students but to faculty and staff as well for had been affected, it was during exams and so we had kids that were preparing to write exams who were getting this information and so of course, there were a lot of kids whose exams were deferred, we had a lot of kids who needed care and assistance. ... student wellness but increasing the hours for people to go get support, we had roving groups that were going through ... [the] library, they were stooping and saying how are you doing. Another thing that we were challenged with was that there were about forty kids at the party, police wouldn't share the list of who was at the party. And so, it was how do we provide support to people we don't even know need support, so then we had to work backwards through the victims support unit with ... police, get the right people tie in to some support, it was also although not publicly known, providing support to the perpetrator's family as well, the ... family was also grieving, he was a student of ours. It was an extremely sad time on our campus, right down to understanding, we had to take everything out of their lockers, and provide it to the families we had to make sure



we'd stop sending automatic emails from student services into the house, because that was devastating. How do we respectfully you know not celebrate their lives but sort of commiserate the day? It was hard...

Typically, when a crisis occurs, the response from the organization facing the crisis can range from pandemonium to a controlled, purposeful, and well-orchestrated crisis resolution, depending on the characteristics of the crisis (Wooten, 2007). In responding to this tragic crisis, the crisis management team sought various ways to act in a decisive and purposeful yet sensitive manner. Martha highlighted the challenge of sharing information with faculty, staff and students because information sharing in this painful tragedy was restricted to the police. The tragedy hit hard on the university community as they sought ways to grieve and provide support.

#### **Martha and crisis communication.**

Martha was not involved in crisis communication, she explained that communication was handled by the university relations team.

So the [murders] were interesting because we had university relations person with us in the EOG [emergency operations group], but most of the communications were handled at a higher level, our EOG [emergency operations group] person was in communication with the ... police service, so we were making sure the information was being shared appropriately but most of the communication were happening at a higher level at the crisis management team level for that one, so I didn't really have much of a finger on that one besides a couple of things that I was talking about.

She talked about the university's effectiveness in handling this crisis:

I think we could probably have done a better job supporting communications I would say. ... I think we could have helped them, and we are at a better place with engaging volunteers to help with some of that. We now have our arms wrapped around the foundation of volunteer group that we could have worked with for that. I think the other piece that we missed that we could have done better is reaching back to the victims' support unit at [the] police earlier, we had a couple of kids that needed a very specific

support in terms of PTSD and so I think we could have been better prepared. Just being better prepared so that we could have supported those kids, maybe faster, yea you know all in all I don't we would have done much differently. Just being better prepared so that we could have supported those kids, maybe faster, yea you know all in all I don't know that we would have done much differently.

Martha explained that communication was handled by the university relations expert, this demonstrates the importance of having different skills sets and portfolios as part of the crisis management team. In addition, evaluations of crisis response was ongoing as the university identified its learnings and determined different ways to improve on its processes.

### **Martha and training.**

Martha gave a detailed breakdown of the activation procedures for emergency management on campus:

I would say, [for] emergency management program and we have various levels of activation. Most of our incidents on campus are really attended to by our first responders, so that would include campus security, that's how I would say 95 – 96% of our incidents are managed at that front level of our first responders. When it gets bigger and I call it when we get the lights and sirens, ... [the] fire department, ... police, [health] services, Emergency Medical Service folks, we have on occasion had to activate our second level, which is called the Emergency Operations Group. So, our EOG [emergency operations group] is activated only when our first responders can't manage the situation on the scene. So, EOG [emergency operations group] only gets activated for large scale emergencies. I am the director of the EOG [emergency operations group] and in that group we follow the incident command system and there's about seventy people who are active members on our EOG [emergency operations group] from across campus. And then I also help with the training and delivery of information to our crisis management team. Our CMT [crisis management team] ... is generally activated when the EOG [emergency operations group] is activated but it also activates for what I would call crises not the lights and sirens. So, where we have things like, I'll give some examples, potentially, things like a bomb threat, where we don't have lights and sirens the CMT [crisis management team] will be activated. And so generally they have a security component to them and so I am at the table as a subject matter expertise for CMT [crisis management team]. And just inside of all that, emergency management, my director of emergency management is responsible for all the training programs for the crisis management team and emergency operations group as well.

She continued:

... For the crisis management team, we do a formal training three times a year sometimes, that involves tabletop exercises, sometimes its guest speakers, sometimes we walk through a check list depending, we try to shake it up a little bit to keep it fresh. The EOG [emergency operations group] is four times a year and then we do some separate training as well with each of the sections, so it can be quite a bit of formal training and that will include like I said a lot of tabletop exercising. We also do what I will call informal training, so where we have crisis on campus and we get an opportunity to exercise with a real event, I can kind of call it an informal training but it's sort of on the ground training. As I mention I think last time, we activate the crisis management team pretty regularly, and so CMT [crisis management team] meets regularly and I would suggest that it's become a bit of a well-oiled machine, just given unfortunately the number of times, it had to activate. And every time we do one of those real-life activations, we fine tune. We fine tune the plan, we finetune the checklist, we finetune the process which we have done w number of times inside the EOG [emergency operations group], so I would say even with every activation we finetune and so would I say the training is adequate.

She discussed the challenges faced by the crisis management team:

I would say we are always slightly challenged by finding time in our calendars. So, the crises management team for instance, in the last few years, we generally cancelled the last training sessions because we have an exhausted CMT [crisis management team], because they will have activated so many times during the year that they're tired and we don't need to do any training sessions. The same with the EOG [emergency operations group] we're challenged, it's a large group people, people finding time in their calendars to make it work and you need a large chunk of time to walk through a number of response cycles to make it feel real, and so, it's challenging to find that time in people calendars. Everybody is so busy right now and it is a very busy campus with lots going on, this is a role that people do, it's a volunteer role that they take on because they have deep institutional knowledge it's not their primary role, so of course you are trying to get to come into training can sometimes by challenging. I will say the trainings are really effective when you get everyone in the room, and we use that training to fine tune our programs.

Martha talked about some learnings she had from handling these different crises:

We are getting quite better at these crisis, for instance, the difference between the way we managed the flood and the way we managed the fire, really speaks about our learning and how we were much better prepared for the fire and in fact I was telling ... the other day, the learning that I took from [the murders], I use now. I use it for our suicides and for our other deaths on campus, I use learnings from that still today. So, I think that every time we manage through one of these and there's always a little nuance to any of these crises, always a bit unique in the way that they unfold but some of the foundation and

fundamental pieces I use them for every single one of these. I would say every time we through one of these I feel prepared with better information to make decisions for the next time it happens.

Martha gave a general breakdown of the composition of the different crisis response teams and how the structure was organized. She expounded further on the types of training the crisis teams received and pointed out the issue of training fatigue. Based on her responses about learnings, it is interesting to see that whatever learnings she had from previous crisis response, she applied to the next crisis.

### **Martha and self-care/mental healthcare.**

The conversation turned to self-care and mental health. Martha explained that leaders sometimes do not look after themselves though they are at the frontline. She concluded by revealing what her support system was and what her self-care practices were:

The funny thing is the worst people to look after themselves are the frontline, so in fact we had an issue last night and I phoned to campus security and said have you got support? ... I have peer support ... I have an excellent team, I have a fantastic team and I think we talked about this before about trust and I just think that we are able to debrief and decompress as a team because we can talk about it. The other person that I talk a lot is the vice provost student experience, [she] and I, when we have these kinds of crises, we are a good team together because we can use each other to bounce off. And I find my self-care is actually outside the institution. My thing is physical activity, so I need to walk, to run, I need to do something that gives me some down time, where my brain isn't still running, so it's allows me to decompress and think. So that's my self-care.

Peer support, excellent team and trust are some of the words Marth uses to express the relationship and support within her team. She has established a close relationship and strong partnership with vice provost students' affairs making them a good team. Interestingly, she recognizes the type of self-care she needs, and she engages in self-care.

## **Participant #8 Jane Smith**

Jane Smith is the vice president finance and services. She oversees finance, information technologies, environmental health safety and security, all ancillary operations that includes, bookstore, residences, parking, food service, internal audit and human resources for the institution. She handles all financial processing for the institution that includes the treasury group and payroll financial reporting to the government and the outside communities. Her information technology portfolio includes networking applications, and data centers for the institution. In addition, she is responsible for the human resources portfolio. She shares responsibility of The University Faculty Association, with the provost and as well as [the provincial] Union of Public Employees and management professional staff. Inclusive are the policies, the terms and conditions of employment, including compensation, organizational development, recruiting, regular HR stuff for the entire institution.

For environmental health safety and security, she oversees all the occupational health and management system that also includes risk and insurance and enterprise risk management plus the insurance portfolio. In addition to the security operations for the entire organization, and internal audit. She is also a member of the crisis management team, actively participating in all responsibilities.

### **Jane Smith and prior crisis experiences.**

Jane talked about her prior experiences in handling crises:

In my past life I actually ran an Argentine company in Buenos Aires Argentina. The first one that I really had to manage ... the general manager was, we actually had a child who was riding a horse and he and the horse came onto the highway and were hit by one of my employees and they were both killed; the horse and the child, and then my employee was severely injured. That was the first, I would say true crisis, I had to manage. I had lots of training up till then but it's a little different when that happens and then [I was] not

leading the crisis but part of the crisis management team. [Another incident was] ... the death of an employee on our rig and so in both those cases the crises were around the death of an individual.

Of the 11 participants interviewed, Jane is the second person with experience dealing with crises related to death.

### **Jane Smith and competencies of a crisis leader.**

The literature tends to suggest that there are different competencies required to respond to crises. Jane discussed what she believed to be the competencies required:

I think the first one is calmness, you have to be able to bring that calm because the people around you are looking for that. You need to know what you know and you need to know what you don't know, you need to rely on the experts to fill in the blanks and you should be there bringing your oversight your direction but not trying to get in the way of the people who actually have to do the on the ground dealing with the crises. I have been in crises rooms where everybody tries to lead the operations and it does not work. Vice presidents as a group should not be doing such work and not because we are not capable but where the organization is. I think looking from a competency perspective is you have the ability to allocate resources, you're staying calm, you've the ability to manage communications, to manage the reputational aspects, this is where vice presidents really or a crises team should really shine, let the operations group deal with who needs to be where, what needs to be cleaned up, what needs to be cordoned off because they're looking to you for that overarch. I think the other competency and it goes back to what I talked about the role on the team, is you need to be competent in the organization not in your functional area. We ... have the emergency operations group, they're competent in the functional area. We need to be looking from an institutional lens, financially, operationally, reputationally, that's our role not as a competency because if you can't look on that overarch you are not going to be successful as a crisis management team leading and guiding the institution through the crises.

When asked if she believed she demonstrated any of the competencies discussed above, Jane spoke about a crisis she had experienced and how she handled the situation:

I'm going to talk about ransomware, and I think it's the better one to talk about because I could do the fire or the ransom, I was not here for the flood and ... the [murders], so I can't talk to those, but, just so you know what happened in ransomware. At about one in the morning on a Saturday morning, we found a ransom note on a critical server, so it was a cyber-attack. I got called about five in the morning and I actually led the crises team for the actual response. I was also on the crisis management team for the university

and that was kind of by design because I had prior experience with crises. My CIO was not in the city ... and nobody else had experience in a broad-based crisis setting, and this was broad based because we ended up with over five hundred ransom notes, we lost our communication system, we lost the majority of our emails, we lost our void phones, we lost all the ways we communicate on campus and it was quite wide spread and it was a big crisis. So, my role starting at five in the morning on that Saturday was basically getting the facts, understanding what was going on, putting on my hat to say who needs to be informed, because again I am not an IT specialist and I was not down looking at bits, bites and boxes. Working between our insurance group and getting in touch with the adjuster, getting a breach coach, bringing in legal, bringing in privacy, bringing in cyber experts from outside that was me kind of giving my guidance on those areas, how are we setting up not what are we doing, I didn't have capability of what we were doing and then I would say more than anything in that one was care and feeding of employees and I mean that both spiritually and also physically and then staying calm and directing traffic. ... My group, the crisis management team, we met that day at about noon it was broader, we had a big thing going on in campus, we actually had [the] fire victims here, we had all these things going on, so that was more about what are the impacts going to be on the institution, talking a lot about reputationally.

Jane talked about the loss of communication as one of the concerns of another crisis that was covered by the university and she illustrated the required competencies in handling this crisis. Although this is not a crisis, we will study in detail, however, many of her points are important. Her comments are very illustrative because the malware attack took out the emails of the entire university spanning 25 years.

She continued as she explained explicitly what her role was during the response:

My role in the actual crisis room was really directing traffic, stewarding to what the deliverables were, were they being met, was I talking to the right external parties, we spent a lot of time talking about reputationally and operationally what was going on. Interestingly enough, very little about the financial because the ransom was very low, Bitcoins weren't worth very much at that time. But to me, when I started with calmness, in the IT group and in the crisis room we were meeting four times a day. ... One of my people over here came into my office and I was only back and forth a little bit in my office and he said "oh good you're here I need to talk to you" and I said "I hate to do this to you but I have got to get through some stuff on my desk and I've got to go back to the other crisis room" and he said "well what do you mean crisis room"? "And I said, well we've got a really major IT crisis going on right now and he looked at me and he said well because we had started provisioning email accounts that was getting back to normal,

everybody on the surface was back to normal and he looked at me and said “well I can’t tell that you’re in a crisis” and I looked at him and said “well that’s good because I don’t think you want me running around with my hair on fire”.

Jane continued the discussion, elaborating on the importance of staying calm and showing leadership:

Probably the biggest accolade I got from the external people we worked with especially in that crisis room was “you stayed so calm, you stayed so metered, you brought the confidence”. I think crisis teams need to bring confidence to the institution. ... I think the other is bringing that sense of order and calmness and caring and not making it clinical like even in the ransomware, people were emotionally impacted they couldn’t get their contacts on their phones, they couldn’t get their emails. You have to meet people where they are both intellectually and emotionally and then as a crisis team people look to you, so when you're in the middle of a crisis and people know you are the vice president and that could be the provost, that could be the vice president research, me, facilities, it doesn’t matter which it is, they’re looking at us and they’re looking for behavioral clues and so if we’re not modelling that calmness, that sense of order, we have things under control and you can’t fake that, so if you’re not under control in that crises room, you’re not going be able to fake it coming out of that crisis room so you’ve got to figure out and get the stuff out on the table that you’re not in agreement with, you’re not aligned on that’s causing you grief, that's what you do in the crisis room.

Jane’s response collaborated with what the literature reported about surface and deep acting engaged in by leaders (Hochschild, 1983, 1990) in response to their understanding about what feelings were appropriate or inappropriate to display in crisis situations. Hochschild (1983) noted that leaders had the tendency to manage or change their emotions so that these felt emotions were consistent with a situation.

### **Jane Smith and the crisis of the wildfire.**

When asked about her initial reaction to the news of the wildfire, Jane explained that the fire was being tracked by the crisis management team, and there was some contemplation if evacuees would relocate to the city and how the university might provide support:

My initial reaction about the fire, we were tracking it as it was getting closer ... and ... I think just because it was on the radar screen because of our experience with the flood. ...



We were looking at it initially within my team, more from, if they have to evacuate a few people ... we'll work with them because we have all this great learning that we got from the flood. ... we knew about the mass evacuation just because we were thinking we could at that point from the emergency management response, lend a hand ... my initial thoughts and feelings were thank God, we've been through the flood, cause I'm getting coached from my team and there're just giving me learnings and so I could bring those to the crisis team.

Jane continued talking about the numbers that eventually moved into residence and the logistics involved:

... Now of course when they started talking about the full city was being evacuated, then we went into a different mode, and again this was not at the crises management level, this was at operational response, so we immediately started reaching out to the residences, where are we, what's going on there and then quite shortly thereafter, we did strike a crisis management team because we figured we would end up as an evacuation center. Initially, what the government said is kind of, the lion share of people would go either to places that they knew, or they would go to [a different city] and we'll get the trickle down. I think what ended up happening was, people made their own decisions about where they were going to go. So, there were kind of the two reaction stages, one was ok, let's make ourselves prepared, our people prepared that they can be part of any response. ... Two, ok, how do we get prepared here and it was that we are getting prepared here that brought the crisis management team together and so of course our initial reaction was obviously, we're going open our doors, we're going learn what we did from the flood and we had a lot of learnings. ... The first word from the government was, you are only going to have 300-400 evacuees that honestly in about an 8-hour period changed to 1500.

... So, we knew we were taking in evacuees pretty much as they started evacuating the city. ... I think the biggest thing for us, was a lot of making decisions on the fly, so do we not take animals, what do we do? it's going from 300 to 1500. Do we take them, do we not take them, well, think about the reputation and ...[the] news standing in front of you know residence offices saying and university... has chosen not to support the people. But interestingly, the other reactions in the room and this was real ... we were hosting on campus 10,000 conference delegates and a fair chunk of them were slated to live in the residences and we had no idea how long the people were going to be in the residences, so they were anx[anxious] to know what we [were] doing about that. This is reputational also, we've made commitments, so lot of things going on behind the scenes that people didn't know including striking some arrangements with downtown hotels, you can't reputationally kick an evacuee, can you imagine a whole lot of academics were coming in so we're kicking out these poor evacuee families with nowhere to go. But this is the joy of the crisis team because the crisis management team met, and we debated all these things, on what do we do, where do we go and how do we deal with this? What if the

evacuees aren't gone and where are the people going? How do we accommodate? So, anyway, I would say the initial response was very focused, it took all those learnings from the flood, and we had so many learnings and we were incredibly well organized, people got where they needed to be, families and we had kids going to schools here, finishing up their school. We opened up play programs, gym time for the athletics, it was a full response by the full institution and that's where the crisis management team is important.

She then disclosed the learnings from the flood that were applied to the wildfire crisis as evacuees moved into residence:

Probably the biggest thing was underestimating the needs of the population, they were very different populations. Really thinking through based on the demographic that's coming, what we need... So, you spend a lot of money, you've got to get everything set up; you've got residences, you've got food, at some point you have to make a claim back, so when we did the flood, we had to take up a couple of accountants who had to take a couple of months to actually take a look at our books and records. ... One of the big learnings was [to] set up a different code that everybody uses, so guess what when had to make claims for the fire, when we had to make claims for ransomware all the costs were collected one place ... A[nother] learning [was] about different populations and every population is different. ... We had a welcome center from the government on campus we needed to find space for them, we had similar things during the flood so just knowing how to do that, how to cut through the red tape, how to use the executive leadership team effectively to make sure we got where we needed to, understanding the need for just wireless.

I think the biggest learning was how to scale up quickly and what the key activities are that need to be done to accommodate the guests to your campus and we got caught a little bit with the flood cause suddenly buses were showing up and we weren't quite ready. We would have been equally caught with the fire, had we not had the flood learning cause, we started looking and going ok, it's x time of the day ... we already have these people, we need to be ready to accommodate more. So, we were much more fluid, we didn't have much line ups, these were people from the ... fires who had driven 13/14 hours with children and pets, and emotions. I mean they don't know if their house is still standing, they've been evacuated from their city, from their homes, you don't want them standing in a line for 3 hours while we go oh there's extras here, we have to make up some beds. So, we learned a lot from the flood about being ready and being able to just mobilize

Gainey (2009) suggested that four strategies were useful in resolving crises:

communications, relationships with internal audiences, visibility and involvement of school

leadership. Jane's response collaborated with what was in the literature as she pointed out that the university proactively communicated with its internal units, was visible and involved as they took in evacuees. She suggested that there were a few challenges in the crisis response process such as underestimating the needs of the population and quickly expanding crisis response operations.

### **Jane Smith and collaborations/partnerships.**

A collaborative partnership with agencies of emergency management can be the strength of an institution during a crisis. When there are collaborations between teams, the process of emergency management may be more effective. Jane elaborated on these partnerships:

Oh yeah, it was amazing and I'm not sure, it wasn't us developing it. ... The amazing thing about the resilience of the city, the amazing thing about the resilience of other organizations like the ... Board of Education, is that was pretty much all set up by, I think the Monday or the Tuesday and like you think about in my mind, crises seem to always happen. The big ones that are bringing people here always happen on weekends but if you think about it and we could give normalcy and continuity to those children and you know, education is important, ... the whole dialogue with ... about what do we do for these high school kids who have been relocated, who have diploma exams, what do we do about that? That all got resolved very quickly. Then you have schools like us saying 'what do we do for admissions if a student didn't write diplomas?' How are we going deal with that one? So that was all involved. So that whole educational piece was, I remember going home one night and saying to my husband, this is so cool like we had 1485 I think guests ... and those kids were in school and they were accommodated cause our schools are not like, they're all kind of over flowing but the fact of that went on and then right through what do we do about diploma exams and what do we do about university and college admissions? And what all this schools were in their own worlds debating what do I do if a child did not write a diploma exam? It was really cool, so lots going on in our place was those kids have to have a lunch to take to school, those kids need to know where school is, their parents need to know, so our part in that was making sure that those kids were there we had school supplies for them, you know lot of these families were left with nothing. We got them school supplies, so our part was making sure those kids were ready to be there to learn. Yeah so that's what we did.

When asked if the university contacted the education school board, Jane indicated that the university was secondary to that arrangement and pointed out that their role was to provide accommodation:

No, we were more secondary to that, we were more about welcoming, giving accommodation, making sure there were meals etcetera. That was other people doing that but letting us know. That would have been [the city's] education, like, I said there was a whole Government kind of crises response team that we were feeding into as were many others. I mean it was 85000 people, this was big.

In discussing collaborations with other institutions Jane explained that the university's emergency manager handled that. She spoke highly of him and his reputation in dealing with crisis:

He is so involved ... our emergency manager guy and [had] lots of discussions with other universities, other colleges that were taking people in, lots of discussion with the [city's] response group and he is somebody who is very sought after he speaks nationally about our experiences and I'm very proud to say from an emergency management perspective, we are best in class.

Jane explained that although the primary responsibility of the university was to provide accommodation for evacuees, they had conversations with the city's School Board in order to provide continuity in schooling and some level of normalcy to the students who were evacuated. As a result of these conversations, some exceptions were made for students who could not take their high school diploma exams which was a requirement for admission into the university. The university made exceptions and figured out a way to enable the affected students begin their undergraduate programs.

## **Jane Smith and crisis communication.**

Communication during crisis is an important aspect of crisis response. Communicating with the public and stakeholders when an unexpected crisis occurs is imperative. Jane expounded on the different ways that crisis communication could take place:

We tend to, when we put out messaging, we put it out on all channels. Here's a few things I know and I'm going use ransomware because that was mine. We had over 500 ransom notes, not one was leaked, we didn't have one leaked to the media and I think that's 2-fold. One, there's a shame aspect but more importantly to communicate, is have those holding statements ready to go, when you put out a holding statement, you are 50/50 depending on the event that the actual media is going to come in, have the response prepared in advance. I will give you an example. We had ransomware, we had the little tick around the webpage going, we are experiencing network difficulties more to come, check back with this channel, we have ... the app, we repurposed it for ransomware, cause we had no email, so we set up a senior leadership channel, we set up a crisis management channel, if I needed to get all the senior leadership of the organization in the room I put it out on the app. We also used the app to say hey we're having network difficulties. Where we brought the media in, and we kind of predicted it... We needed to tell the community on a weekend in the spring not to turn on your machines, so the only way we could think of doing that was ... we had campus security walk around with a note on my letterhead put it on every exterior door on campus saying "please do not turn on your computer" for more and at the bottom please download the emergency app. So, we knew that would likely get some attention, so we had already pre-prepared I remember sitting nine o'clock pm with our communications group from UR (university relations) coming up with what is our response, if the media calls, it was already done. So, we weren't reactive, we worked proactively....

Jane continued talking about the ransomware and the reasons why it was important to be transparent with information.

... We say we are open, and we are transparent, you can't be selectively open and transparent and credibility and that's part of that leadership thing, you've got to live your values and you have to live them through a crisis that's when it really matters. ... I've stood in front of a lot of tv cameras and I talked about paying ransom, I talked about what it was, and I got accused in the press because I was the person on it, (it was them talking about the university but they were using my name), about supporting organized crime, and perpetuating this kind of crime and you know what, at the end of the day we lived our values and we've continued to. ... The communication was very very important that we use all channels, we try and reach all people. We craft the message, now for ransomware we went to a third party who had some expertise in doing communication for

some of the big hospitals in the States, so we went to them and got their guidance, so that's the other thing you never stand back and say we are the smartest people in the room. So, for that crisis ... we used a breach coach, we used an external party for communication because you never want to in a crisis think you know it all and by God rely on people who've been there, done that bought the T-shirt, ... we are not the smartest on this, we were learning as we went, why not rely on people who are smart and who've already learned. So, communications all forms, proactive, have statements ready, and when necessary make sure you are telling your own story, don't let others tell your story for you, floods, fire, ransomware easier to tell the story, very tricky when its [murders] that's a whole level of emotional impact, the others are clinical, the [murders] was emotional...

An effective crisis communication is a team effort as Jane illustrated with the malware crisis. To demonstrate how effective crisis communication was, Jane explained that there was constant communication with stakeholders, updated information on the website, the use of the university emergency app, and a third-party expertise was employed. She emphasized that the university was open and transparent with all forms of communications and proactive statements were issued. She emphasized the importance of telling your own story during crisis response and not allow others portray a negative image or story.

### **Jane Smith and training.**

When asked about processes in place for crisis management, Jane was convinced the university had strong processes in place for crisis management:

... We have very very strong processes, strong documentations, strong roles and responsibility. We know who should be where, when and how, so, I don't think there is any huge deficiencies. I think what happens in every one of these though is you hone, and you tweak. We debrief as a crisis management team, how we did.

Jane then explained what the university had done to support her training and preparation:

We do table tops, we do them with external people, we do them internal, we also bring in speakers, so we just had an emergency response person from the Conference Board ... speaking to our crisis management team and our emergency operations people. We've had ... Virginia Tech talk about her experiences. I think it's beyond just table tops, because I think it's also the live exercise. These things help drive some points home that

you can't get in a tabletop, cause it's not an emotional piece and I think the live exercise, it was emotional even though everybody knew it was fake, ... and listening to a Virginia tech survivor or having ... from Conference Board talk about emergency preparedness and bringing in some different events from around North America because it's so unfortunate but it's almost like we see it weekly. You know, in the last two weeks, we've had the camp fire in California that we've all been seized of and a 1000 oaks parachuting. ... We've had Virginia Tech twice because we've brought their crises leadership in also and its funny when we brought them in we did a broader one in the morning for the senior leadership and the emergency operations responders. Then we had separate meetings, smaller group with the emergency operations group had one and then the crisis management team had another in the afternoon to be able to really say what do you do about this, how did this work, or what did you do about social media all those things. Giving us the opportunity as an institution and as crisis team to learn from others

She continued the discussion and explained the advantages of having an individual with firsthand experience in crisis management conduct a training:

... You can get very myopic if all you do is table tops, cause then you kind of feel good, like we're really good at. ... When you sit with people who'd been through a real crises and you see their emotions come out as to what this was for them then you feel like you're there, when you have a live exercise on the campus, there's people literally walking around wounded or dying in the hall ways then you feel like you're there. So, I think all of those things, I think we do very well. I'd love to say we could be able to do them more often but we do them regularly enough ... it's good that we bring the crisis team together even though it's a smaller crises because it keeps us toned and it keeps us working as a team in that environment because I guess the one thing we didn't talk about is, the one thing I've learned is, you can have a great team but that great team may react very differently in a crisis because adrenaline's different, emotions are different, response is different so the fact that we have smaller things that are still deemed to be crises allow us to keep working in that kind of, it's a heightened state and there's more at stake. ... So, the fact that we have opportunities. I look at the university and I always describe it to people as; we are I think the 7<sup>th</sup> largest city, if you put a wall around us in the province on a given day we have 40000 people in fall or in winter, we have medical services, we have a fuel tank, we have emergency services. Cities have crises, we need to be able to respond to them, I like the fact we do our health and safety week ... I went to the opioid and lots of training this year, having those things, think about that, what does that mean to our campus?

Jane then focused on her preparedness for her first crisis response. She recalled feeling inadequate and not prepared. She decided to do something about that and sought both formal and informal crisis management training:

No, not initially like I said in my first training exercise. I really screwed up and probably mostly because I got emotional and if I revisit the child and the horse. I put too much stock in the fact that I didn't have the language and not enough thought about being physically present because I was more concerned with the fact that I couldn't speak, I was very new to Argentina, I didn't have very much Spanish. So, no, but I think two things, I sought to learn formally, I have sought to learn informally. I try to learn from what I've done wrong once. I might not do it 100% the next time but it's going to be better and I think that that's really important. To me it's more about, I don't think you are ever perfect at it, I think what I've really learnt to be is calm and metered and properly communicative and I've learnt those things over time, this is not something, you don't learn it in one crisis, you learn it in twenty crises. Every time you look and say what could I have done better and quite honestly, you get better at it because you have to. I think I am far more prepared now than I was historical, I think it's one of those things you want to be prepared but you hope it never happens but the reality is when you are dealing with a city which we are, it's hard not to happen right, because it's just the nature of it, it's just how it works.

Crisis training creates an awareness and a development of the different crisis management skills required. Wang and Hutchins (2010) suggested that preparing an organization, in advance, by training on crisis management is better than paying a high cost in the future as evidenced in the Virginia Tech crisis. Jane used the word "strong" to emphasize the state of preparation, training and strength of processes of the crisis management team.

### **Jane Smith and self-care/mental healthcare.**

The conversation then turned to self-care and mental health. Jane talked her self-care as having people, safe spaces to talk, doing some simple exercises and her faith:

I'm lucky to have a lot of people here that are safe spaces that I can blow off steam with. I'm pretty driven as you can imagine, sometimes, I need to step back a little bit. I also need people around me to kind of be a little bit of that poky person to say step back, get some perspective. I think that that helps me a lot with selfcare and mental health. The hardest crises here for me to deal with are suicides and I actually talk them through. I am



from a faith based, I talk them through with someone from my faith based not with details but just my emotions, because they get wrapped up and I have trouble completely separating myself from a clinical aspect of a child dying to the emotional aspect of a child dying. As a parent and just as a person, as a human being, what I've learnt is communication. You need a safe space, you need to be able to talk them through and I'll probably not use the rest of the people in the crisis room because they are going through the same thing. So, you kind of need somebody who has perspective and I have people who will poke me and say you need to go home or go and get a coffee.

She gave examples of her self-care technique:

One of things that I did, and I do it on regular basis, but ransomware was very interesting because I was living and breathing that from 6am to midnight every day, because you need [to be] consistent at the leadership level in a crisis room. That is important or that can be very confusing and actually very off putting to people who are actually trying to manage a crisis. I had kind of a routine that once a day and it was beautiful outside, I would walk from here... and I would get coffee, which is one of my creature comforts.

There are three things, one is music, for me music centers me, I love faith-based music that centers me and the playlist for the crisis is different from the playlist that everything is going well and that's a good thing. The second is exercise, getting up, getting out of your chair, you've got to move around and that's a regenerating thing, and that's part of selfcare during a crisis, so just getting up and going for a walk breathing some air and having some physical activity very important for me that helps center me. The third thing was, when you are out walking, ... when you are wandering, the cool thing is everybody else is in a normal life, they are in a normal state, you are not. You've got a thousand things going on in your head and a whole bunch of stuff and it kinds of grounds you because those are normal people working around the campus having a conversation about what movie they are going to or what they just did in class and its grounding and its centering and it gets you out of your head and it gets you out of yourself as to that's the world, you can't stop what's happened. ... So, I have lots of outlets and I have some very trusted people that have seen me at my best and have seen me at my worst and they don't judge, they are just there and they are not trying help, they are just there cause you have to kinda help yourself, so to me, there are people who've taken a mentoring role or coaching role they ask me questions, what can you do differently?, have you? Whatever it is, but they are not solving the problems, its actually not theirs to solve. ... I know my triggers ... I also try not to use anybody in my family as a sounding board because they are part of that normalcy that I don't need to drag them into the depths, if I'm in the depths. ... I have certain quotes that just play in my head, there's a great one, it's about being deliberate not lying in anchor and drifting. I always think when I am in a crisis, inaction is a decision and so that whole point about not drifting and lying in anchor, I may not have it all right and the team might not have it all right but inaction is as much as

a decision as action and the problem is that inaction is a passive decision and action is a physical decision and so I love that quote.

Jane concluded the discussion with the subject of employee care and attention during crisis and the type of care she provides for her staff:

The other thing we haven't talked about is employee care and attention. One of the things that I have found in many crises is because you are in a grade order organization, this is a grade order organization, people have such a strong sense of ownership and sometimes lack the judgement to know that ownership should not take the place of taking care of yourself. ... for ransomware by noon on the first day, we'd already set up work schedules because we knew it will be 24/7 and that point, we had people who had been awake and had been in the university on and off for 36 hours. ... we started feeding people at 6 in the morning, I'll tell you if you wanted to eat for the ten days of the ransomware, ... there was more food that could be imagined but it was important. I went one day and bought every deli bar, booster bar, DQ sandwich at stadium dairy queen and walked around and gave everybody ice cream treat. [I] did the same a few days later with popcorn because it's part of making them take care of themselves but it makes a huge difference when senior leadership acknowledge what they are doing. Part of employee care and feeding for me is that's when leaders need to be present, that's when leaders need to be shaking hands and saying thank you genuinely doing it, not oh my god, you are taking up so much time in my day that I'll do this. It needs to be from the heart and that's really important to me. ... I walked people to cars in both of those saying you are not going to be any good to me, I want you to go home now and there were a couple of times, I actually pulled the VP card and said you know what I am in charge and you are leaving, they kind of looked at me...now both in those instances, they both came back and said thank you. But at the time, it's that ownership and I think you need to understand that in a crisis the people who care are very strong owners and they don't want to let it go, they want to be there, they want to be present, they want to help and you've got to tell them, the time has come for you to just take some downtime ... Sometimes senior leaders lose track of the fact that there's these whole group of people that are actually exhausted like hamsters on wheels trying to get things done and it means a different thing if it comes from me versus a leader below me.

Jane engaged in different self-care strategies such as listening to faith-based music, walking, communication. She has a strong support system for those tough emotional days. She brought up the issue of employee care and attention and pointed out the importance of senior leaders showing concern and care for their staff. Jane's type of self-care collaborates with a study

conducted by Fein (2001) where he found that school leaders recovering from a school shooting draw on their spiritual and faith-based beliefs to help them cope.

### **Participant #9 John**

John is the director of emergency management for the university. He leads the university management team in all aspects of emergency response and business continuity as well as fire safety. He handles everything from mitigation, prevention, planning and preparedness response and recovery. He facilitates all the training exercises for the crisis management team as well as the emergency operations crew and first responders. He is involved in planning, executing, training exercises, presentations, developing checklist and workflow for the crisis management team. In addition, he works with the emergency operations crew to facilitate and design all the training. In collaboration with his team, he plays a primary role in the emergency operations crew during emergencies. He is the liaison officer for the emergency operations crew, liaising between external agencies such as the fire departments. He is the incident commander for tactical operations.

#### **John and prior crisis experiences.**

John has had past experiences dealing with various crises situations. He began his career at the university as a primary responder and has been in emergency operations for eleven years:

Prior to the beginning, we had the emergency management department [it] was only officially a department since April 2014, but I've been here since March 2007. I was hired by the environment health and safety, and I was the primary responder. We had very few Emergency Operation Group [EOG] activations prior to that. The emergency operations were very different then. Before the flood happened in that year, we had done a lot training, changes and incident command structure, when the flood happened, which helped quite a bit. But prior to that it was very different.

He explained why the structure was different prior to 2014:

... The EOG [emergency operations group], the training and program weren't as mature. ... Back then, [there] was not a lot of resources or emphasis put on emergency operations and crisis response. It was concerted executive level effort to put some focus and resources on enhancing the emergency response and crisis management capabilities.

John explained that the emergency management department was made an official department in 2014, this was just prior to the first major crisis experienced by the university.

Wang and Hutchins (2010) noted that with the increasing levels of crises that colleges and universities are faced with today, if an organization is not prepared, and is without a response plan, the effects of any event can quickly spiral into multiple crisis events that exposes the weakness of an institution. Imagine not having some level of preparation before the crisis, the outcome and response the university would have experienced would probably be more devastating.

### **John and competencies of a crisis leader.**

John described what he believes are the competencies of a crisis leader:

Number one would be to model calm. During a crisis, adrenaline flows, things happen, you have first responders to deal with, that's where training comes in handy but for a leader, they have to model calmness because they set the tone. If the leader is not calm and is losing it, then the rest of the team in operations is going to follow suit and the team will not have an effective operation. ... In the university setting it's even more difficult than some [to lead] because it's more of a command and control situation. We are not going and getting committees and debating or stakeholder input, while there are things happening, decisions have to be made and somebody has to lead with support. Prior to a crisis is leadership to build out the proper team and the training to be able to support that.

For John, calmness was an important competency because of the command and control structure of the team.

### **John and the crisis of the flood.**

John explained that the university had only ever been closed once in 1997 during a snowstorm. To close the university seventeen years later presented many logistical challenges:

The flood and fire were both housing evacuees, but they were both very different events. A couple of things. During the flood, we initially activated the EOG [emergency operations group] because we were closing the university. CMT [crisis management team] had made the overall decision to close the university. We weren't flooded, there were no facilities impacted. It impacted the people and state of local emergencies and with the authorities telling people to get off the roads to stay home, the university couldn't say well, you are supposed to be at work and at class. So, that's what we were dealing with, we were trying to close the university. We had ever only closed for one day in 1997 for a snow storm. And it's not something we can say don't come in we're closed. There was still research going on, [and] animals, we had a major conference going, we have a hotel on campus, depending on the time of year there was building operations.

He continued talking, explaining that the university was not aware they were receiving evacuees, they were taken by surprise to see evacuees arriving on campus. They had not received prior notice nor were they informed. They were unprepared:

... and then the evacuees, we didn't know that we were getting evacuees. They just started showing up at the hotel ... We got a call from the hotel that there were all these evacuees, buses were showing up. They were to support them, we talked to ... [the city's] emergency management agency and they said no they are not there, but we said yes, they are! At the reception centers, they just wanted to get people moved out. So, that whole side was not prepared, which is not against ... [the city's] emergency management agency, they had never been through that they were just preparing for it. It was trial by fire, but we learned a lot through that... We had to get the whole emergency group and that's where we kicked off. We didn't have plans to deal with it, neither did the city, there had been no exercise or training on that. It was all kind of new, winging it. We fortunately had been just that year, training on a new incident and command system and solidifying the process of the EOG [emergency operations group]. We were able to use that to manage that, even though we didn't have plans just as the city didn't have plans for managing evacuating 90,000 people.

When asked if the city had never experienced flooding and why they were unprepared.

John was pointed out that there had been flooding in 2005, however, the flooding of 2013 was on a larger scale. He discussed the issues of having a certain type of demographic as evacuees:

In 2005, there was pretty big flood but not like 2013. And that was the largest evacuation at that point ... The flooding wasn't nearly as extreme in 2005 and nobody had modeled for that. The university's impacted, we're closed and were bringing in evacuees as well.

We got a very different demographic which turned into our own crisis. Because it was primarily from the shelters and drop in centers in the streets, [those were] the bulk of the people we got. The numbers we were seeing weren't that huge, but we also got no support and we didn't have the same support facilities as the drop-in center does. They got dropped here, they got access to their room, with their own key and food and use of facilities and things got pretty out of control...

As things got quickly out of control, and the university struggled to get the necessary human power to control the situation. It was chaos for the first six days. John described what took place:

The first six days were tough, were really tough, I was the liaison, at first am dealing with the... emergency management agency, am liaising primarily through the emergency social services unit which deals with all that. People that were working in that unit, most of them had been asked the night before if they would do it, they had no training or anything else, the emergency operations center itself ... were overwhelmed. I am talking to them that we need police ... it took six days to get police on site ... it was, I still remember a Wednesday night, I get a call from the superintendent, he finally got word from his patrol officers, because if we call 911 any car will come but we never got a coordinated response. He said he found out what was happening and at eight o'clock the next morning, he was here with 8 officers and then we felt a strategy. We started swipe teams with police, our residence services and social workers, started going through the buildings and checking on and verifying who was here and who shouldn't be here. People were hiding, the word was getting out, they all had cell phones and they were also calling other people to come in, it was crazy.

John expounds that the university had two other types of demographic during the flood. These were flood evacuees from another city and some law enforcement officers. Although these law enforcement officers stayed in residence, they offered little help in quelling the out of control crowd. John:

The [other city] demographic was ... English as a second language and other people that didn't have other support but were families. Our initial group which was the vulnerable population was about 186, we could have helped hundreds of people if we didn't have that demographic to deal with. It took so many resources, we got that settled down and then we were able to bring them in. We were also housing 200 [law enforcement] officers and we were having all these criminal type issues, you would think with 200 [law enforcement] officers ... staying here but working in [another city] that we would get

some help ... but we did not. There were some hard conversations, when we contacted the [law enforcement] officers, what we got from them were complaints, but again we doubt some of those things, but it was a communication thing...

John spoke about several challenges encountered as the university dealt with this initial crisis. The challenges listed included communication with external agencies, lack of crisis management plans, unpreparedness of the team and no support in place for the demographic received as evacuees. Without proper crisis plan, preparation and training, crisis response will be ineffective and damaging to the university's reputation. It is interesting to see how the university got through this crisis with all the chaos that was encountered.

#### **John and collaborations/partnerships.**

A collaborative culture allows institutions and crisis management agencies to communicate freely, share ideas and knowledge as well as resources. During collaborations everyone's responsibilities and roles should be clearly delineated. As John talked about his experiences collaborating with other crisis management agencies, you could sense his frustrations:

In the flood, they [the crisis management agencies] were not prepared, we got 41 days, the first two weeks was very tough, so we ended up setting up an incident command post at the dining center. So, [the city's] emergency management team had their team and they had an incident commander they would work with our incident commander. In the EOG [emergency operations group], we trained people to act as incident commanders on site in the residence operation. ... In the flood, an interesting thing, there were evacuees from [the city's] emergency management agency ... the province was also asking us to take evacuees from [another city], the city was saying no, we need you to save those spaces for us. The university is being relied on for providing houses for evacuees, but we are not hotels, we don't check people in and check people out. We have a move in day, students move in and a move out day. They bring all their own stuff with them, it's not that we have sheets and linens and turn over their beds every day, that's a completely different operation.

John continued explaining that initially the university had no representative on the city's emergency operations. This lack of representative meant the university was not kept in the loop of whatever plans and decisions made by the city and thereby making planning, collaboration and response difficult for the university. He recalled forcing himself into the city's emergency operations group:

... We didn't have the presence of the emergency operations ... with the city, I did one day force my way in, now there are two [of us] and we get a lot done with better understanding. ... We said to [the provincial] emergency agency that yes, we can [provide beds] but you have to designate an incident commander that will come to the site first. We will mobilize, and plan how to move evacuees in and a demobilization plan on how we are going to move people out. It was chaos when we got the initial evacuees through [the city's] emergency management agency. ... Other resources came with the province, Red Cross came with the province, [the city's] emergency management agency didn't have a relationship with Red Cross, the province did. ... So, we ended up working together. ... this [incident] highlighted the need to do more work with [the city's] emergency management agency and now I have a seat as the primary call in [the city's] emergency management agency for postsecondary institutions ... and I work as the liaison primary with in the university as well. We actually get called out when there is any emergency in the city.

We did a training last week a full day training on emergency social services and other training operations, and we involve them in our training exercises. We've done a lot more work interfacing with these agencies.

John discussed the benefits of having collaborations with other higher education institutions in the same city, but admits that forming these collaborations was not readily obtainable due to the nature of the postsecondary institutions:

... It would be nice to have the ability to augment or supplement each other in emergency operations, if we follow similar processes, ... but we are not the same, we are separate, and the institutions are so different. We are obviously the largest but not just that we are also a research university, ... they are all different, so you can't expect people from there to come in here and understand what happens here. In a lot of cases, we are better able to help them, and we do. We share what we develop, and we share resources. We had a group for emergency managers for ... postsecondary as well, we kind of met sporadically and we try to do what we can with the other institutions.



It is obvious from John's response that the university struggled to maintain some level of collaboration with external emergency agencies due to these agencies' unpreparedness for the crisis. Even in situations where there are pre-existing collaborations, these collaborations may be turned upside-down and met with unforeseen and demanding challenges under during a severe crisis (Bodin & Nohrstedt, 2016). Collaborations do not occur spontaneously or in a vacuum, they have to be deliberately planned and prepared for in order to avoid chaos and conflict during the crisis response stage.

### **John and the crisis of the wildfire.**

The university got a call from the city's emergency management agency requesting that they take in about 200 evacuees from the fire. The extent of the evacuation was not yet understood. The university eventually ended up housing about 1600 evacuees. John explained in detail what had occurred:

It was just that we got the call from ... [the city] emergency management agency, so we started making plans and they were 200 and we were guessing, we would get them Thursday, ... but got them on Friday. We told them we will prep for 200 and we ended up by Sunday with almost 1600. We were not just housing them, it was also a reception center, so people that weren't staying in the evacuee housing... they needed to register ... to get other services... We were doing 1600 meals three times a day, over the scope of Friday to Sunday.

The staff on ground were overwhelmed and more staff was required to provide support to the huge influx of evacuees. John explained:

So, we have residence folks and our conference and activities for the operational activities, so they had to staff up. Our students had just moved out 6 days before we had evacuees, rooms hadn't been cleaned, that wasn't part of the schedule and they had staffed down, [now] they had to staff up. Conference and events had to staff up. The third-party contractor ... who does our food services ... staffed way up. We also got assistance, we did it in the flood also, we had volunteers. We organized a whole force of volunteers during the flood and the fire. We did it much better in the fire and some multi-coordinators, the dean of Social Work, the dean of Nursing, helped to lead theirs and they

used their people, and also psychology and medicine just to help to support the evacuees. ... the faculty of Veterinary medicine set up a clinic in the dining center and in that clinic they did everything, vaccinations, food and then ... [the] emergency management asked if we could send some of our vets to the other reception centers to help, so we did that as well.

John pointed out the difference between the flood evacuees and the wildfire evacuees:

... the fire ... was a state of emergency ... It wasn't the whole province. ... Initially ... when I first heard about it, I'll be honest, my boss had said should we be preparing, and I said there is a lot of capacity between [the two cities], in the end we ended up being the largest reception center of the province. We ended up getting evacuees, we had more notice there. We had been through the flood and had all those experiences, ... but now we have all the learnings from that in place, so it was a much smoother operation ... it was just a housing and shelter and feeding operation. We had unified command with ... emergency management agency, we had 1452 [evacuees], we peaked at 356 during the flood. During the flood, it was much more of crisis because we hadn't done it before and largely because of the demographic. From [the fire] our demographic was mainly families. We had 400 school kids, we had a couple of birds. It was also a large immigrant population of English as a second language. By the time they filtered and got here most people had family or other support systems with them. It was people that didn't have other support that we took in. And that's what it always is. About three percent of the population that need long term housing and shelter. ... People kept coming in as the week wore on because they had been in hotels and running out of money. They'd been sleeping on somebody's couch for too long, ... it was very busy, very hectic, we were much more organized, so it didn't affect the rest of the university aside from the housing impact, ... There wasn't a real role for EOG [emergency operations group] in that circumstance, it was best to have an incident command post on site that managed those same functions that focused on a tactical level.

John continued the discussion, he gave an example of a challenge they faced during the wildfire and his lack of experience in handling that:

One of the big challenges we had during the fire, was Ramadan, we had a large Muslim population, very large. I didn't have any experience to do that but some of our conference events people did and ... our contracted food service supplier was able to deal with that. We were doing hundreds of boxed meals and accommodating, it was all logistics issues. During the fire ... we had lots of linens and supplies moving in. ... We tried to source them, the university uses American express credit cards, and nobody uses American express credit cards, so, one of the people in the logistics unit used his personal credit for \$1850. Those were the type of logistics we had to deal with during the fire. It was busy, it was long hours.

When asked about the university's success in handling the crisis of the fire, John felt the university did a successful job based on feedback received from the evacuees:

It was actually hugely successful ... there were no injuries, ... no fatalities, everyone was getting what they needed, it could have gone better, there were a lot of lessons that were learned and some we had to rectify ... we are still doing that but overall it was a success. ... we were a victim of our own success, so we are the first call for any evacuee ... we got a lot of feedback from our evacuees as well. Everything went very smoothly especially considering from 200 ... we had almost 1600 plus. We had lots of other challenges that came up that were different than during the flood, we dealt with those, but yeah, it was a very successful operation. That was because we were so successful, we didn't need the support of the emergency operation center.

When asked if there were any learnings from managing the crisis and evacuees. John outlined the challenges encountered working with the province, due to their lack of preparedness and planning:

... In the fire, one of our big things was around communication ... we had much more involvement from the province, so our call came initially from ... [the city's] emergency management agency but then we were getting calls directly from the province and they were cutting out ... [the city's] emergency management agency...there was lot of interference from the province [which was] one of our biggest challenges. ... we were trying to get ... [the city's] emergency management agency back in ... that the province deal with [the city's] emergency management agency and [the city's] emergency management agency would deal with us. That way it keeps it much smoother and more effective. ... For a while there they asked us to be on a call with all the reception centers after being on a couple of calls, we told we didn't need to be on these calls, you can deal with this because other reception centers are really having these crises and we will contact you if we need anything. But one of the big things was that we tried to clarify with [the city's] emergency management agency and we are still trying to clarify with the province is what our role is? ... We were doing housing and shelter, ... and we had students coming in July 31<sup>st</sup>. They [the evacuees] had to be out of here and we said that we needed a date for them to move ... so we kept asking the [province], where is the plan, where are they going? There was no plan and then when they finally did, they said they wanted us to tell the evacuees that they had to leave and even put it on our letterhead. No. We did everything that we could, they needed to make other plans. We didn't have any place for these people to go. ... we couldn't say students, you don't have anywhere to stay because we have evacuees.

Eventually the province decided on a date for the relocation of the evacuees, they worked collaboratively with the Red Cross to facilitate relocation of the evacuees from the university residence. John explained:

The province they came up with a date and we helped them to communicate on what the plan was, they primarily had it through Red Cross with their communications, and then they ended up getting supports for anybody who didn't have any place to go, get them registered and ... get them that assistance. We helped to facilitate that part of it on site.

For the fire, when I got the call in the middle of the night, it wasn't from [city's] emergency management agency, ... I didn't talk a lot about the challenges we faced in the fire with the Red Cross and the province, but that's where our relationship with [city's] emergency management agency was so valuable. The province wanted our red and white club to start ... handing out debit cards, a lot of demands, a lot of things went wrong there, they wanted to control the environment. We had 900 people capacity; but, they set up a lot of tables and made everybody wait outside. It was smoking hot, there were no bathrooms, there was no nothing. We grabbed volunteers and I called [city's] emergency management agency ... and got them to rent portapotties, they brought skits of water and granola bars the next day. We did the same thing when it was snowing and raining, we got a hold of [city's] emergency management agency and we got a hold of the stadium and we got them to open up, so we would bring people indoors. It was all again those relationships that helped, that's what's helped me. It's about those relationships that help build a level of trust, if you don't its really going get in the way.

John's comments echoes what Jane said about the large number of evacuees the university received. With such large numbers, it is no wonder that logistics, coordination and role clarification were problems. Without existing relationships to call upon, the university might have run into a deep situation. Building strong relationships and ties is imperative to access resources during crisis response. One of the measurements of an effective crisis management according to John was no injuries, no fatalities, and everyone's needs being met. That is an interesting evaluative tool for measuring an effective crisis response.

### **John and the murders of several university students.**

Responding to murders as a crisis leader is one of the hardest responsibilities anyone can have, especially, when those who have been murdered are students. One can never be prepared to hear such news, nor will one ever forget what it was like to work through such a crisis. John recalled what that first day was like for him:

It was quite early in the morning when I initially heard about it, my initially reaction was, OH NO! I immediately thought of [the activity happening on campus] because everyone is going to tie it to [that activity]. There is value in it but it's a big risk to the university. For me personally, it was a bit of shock as the news started to come out about fatalities, no injuries. There were fatalities, nobody injured because that is highly unusually for any type of violent event, it shows how different that one was. ... It was very sad but then with that event for us it was different because it didn't happen on campus, ... but they were university students. The crisis management team had to be activated because this is a crisis. There was a talk about it in the crisis management group, was it an emergency or was it a crisis? It was really an emergency, there were no light and sirens, no first responder's activity, ...

As John remembered his experiences working alongside others to handle this crisis, he went into a reflective mode. You could see the emotional impact this crisis had on him:

It was a tough one because it was so much different from the flood and anything else, this was actually loss of life, close to home, ... it did impact I think our crisis management and emergency operations group more than we realized at the time. It wasn't an emergency, though we activated the emergency group, ... so we kept it very small but then we ended up calling in some more people. It's easier to send resources away than to get them in, so we were constantly behind at the point. ... In the university a lot of it was the integration and information sharing with the fire medical examiner's office. One of the big challenges was [that] we were getting no official information but on social media it was all out there, and the university was getting hammered. ... In the emergency operations group, we were also monitoring and seeing especially the names and finding everything we could about those individuals, and it turns out it is one of the main tactics due to learnings from Virginia Tech shooting. So, between official information and non-official information, we could piece the names and we could start compiling everything we know. So, that when the officials give us the information, we would have everything ready to go and it's also the same for other incidents that we have fatalities. It's such a big organization, there are so many linkages that you don't think about. We had to make sure that communications were going to the family, if there is a mother and father,

brother or sister on campus, where were they? What faculty were they in? What unit? So, there was a lot of those things as well. We had to try and not cause unintentional harm during the course of regular operations.

The impact of this crisis was deeper and more intense than originally estimated. Everyone involved was under enormous psychological and mental strain. John recollected how he was impacted:

A lot of it was the social and emotional impact. I'll say the closer the people were to the units and departments where those students were from had a larger impact ... It impacted those of us that were dealing with it, ... but for the larger university, it was much more abstract, had it happened on campus, it would have been different. I will tell you one personal thing from that because I didn't think it really affected me much at all, but we went through all that day and then through the next day and we stood down the next morning. I had tickets to a concert with my wife, I decided to go to take my mind off it, the main act when they came out did a couple of songs and then they had some people shot or something going on ... to this day every time I hear that group I think about it.

This crisis destroyed the wall of safety and invulnerability that one uses to shield one's self from harsh realities and from recognizing our essential vulnerability (Janoff-Bulman 1992). The university community was shocked and needed to pull resources together to respond to the crisis. John was more deeply impacted by this crisis than he originally assumed. The need for self-care for crisis leaders can not be overlooked because the emotional impact of dealing with an intense and traumatic crisis can be deeper than an individual might realise.

### **John and crisis communication.**

The conversation turned to crisis communication. John talked about all three crises and the modes of communication employed. Each type of crisis demanded a different form of communication tool. John explained further:

[The murders] was sort of different and again it wasn't an emergency, it was a crisis and so it was the normal channels that we used for communications, emails, newsletters, website, those things. In emergencies and like it was in 2014 and we've done a lot of work since then, it was critical at the type of notification, where the timeliness of the

information has impact on the direct safety and life of the population. So, it's very different than information related to an emergency or crisis. So, websites, newsletters, those were the informational tools. Other types of tools, like the emergency application mobile app because it gets out the information right away on what you need to do, paging through the building systems, we have desktop pop ups, those are critical notifications tools to give people the information they need to keep themselves safe and then we follow up with emails, websites, those are passive systems that they can check to follow up information.

The university faced some internal and external challenges in communication. John recalled these challenges and its impact:

Everything depends on communication especially in an emergency or crisis. We had some challenges initially with communication even with our own teams between the incident command and the emergency operations group. Our challenges like I said, was talking to the emergency services and the emergency operations center for [the city's] emergency management agency and they can't even talk to the police. The emergency operations center couldn't understand what was going on, a lot of it was around ... the external agencies ... That was a difficult one, very challenging during the flood, it was challenging during the fire as well, we did a lot of different things some worked or were more effective.

John argued that everything depends on communication in an emergency. He is convinced that using all types of communication tools is important during crisis management. When there is a breakdown in communication as John noted, it might affect all areas of crisis response, creating confusion and additional uncertainty. The literature on crisis communication collaborated with the experiences described by John (Seeger, 2006).

### **John and training.**

John discussed the importance of continuous training but also acknowledges that continuous training can lead to fatigue. He pointed out that the university has a mature and comprehensive emergency program with every department having a business continuity plan:

... Plans and procedures are one thing, training and exercise is another one and keeping those up. One of the interesting things is, in 2014 we had the flood, we had the murder incident, we had the power outage and a few other emergency events that the EOG

[emergence operations group] were active a lot during 2014. There was a lot of exercising that we were doing and not long after that we had the fire, some of those skills get rusty over time, so we do the training and also to keep things fresh. Sometimes we have training fatigue that happened with the CMT [crisis management team], they are extremely busy people as well. So, [training] is ongoing and we adapt it. Things change so fast, the evolving threats, hazards and situations, trying to keep up on those. Not many postsecondary institutions have an emergency department, the ones that do don't have the amount of resources and positions. Here, we have a very mature program and comprehensive program and we only started in 2014, but we've come quite a long way, in a short amount of time we have created continuity plans for every department. 420 departments all have their own continuity plans and high-risk departments continuity business plans which is specific to their departments and the overall building emergency response plans and the broader emergency response plan.

When asked if he felt well-prepared in terms of training to handle crises, John reflected on his training and preparation and concluded that he felt prepared. He recalls the types of training he has had and observed that there was always room for improvement. He stressed the importance of inviting guest speakers for crisis management training to discuss their experiences with crisis response:

I do, I hope I do, given my role. Are we adequately prepared as an institution? There are always things to work on, we are never done, and things still happen, we always learn something and help to refine as much as we can learning from others and other events. We bring in people from Virginia Tech ... I am working on getting somebody that was involved in the Humboldt bus crash, ... someone from Ottawa, there was parliament shooting and they were on lock down for eight hours, to ask what did you do? What were the challenges there? Were there any collaborations between industry partners, the responders, that is about relationships, it's to build and to maintain and its harder than you think, those relationships between the university, with our response group and for us the emergency operations, we are relying on. If am calling somebody I should know everything about them, they should know me. They have my phone numbers, so they are not surprised when I call...

John said convincingly that the university has a very mature and comprehensive program for training even though these training programs only started in 2014. He pointed out that the value of these trainings cannot be underestimated. He further explained that crisis leaders from



other organizations are invited to speak about their experiences. An interesting thing to note from this discussion, is training fatigue experienced by university leaders due to the constant training. John spoke with pride about the continuity plans developed for all departments in the university.

### **John and self-care/mental healthcare.**

The discussion moves on to his self-care and mental health support both as a first responder and a member of the emergency operations group. John assumed he didn't need self-care, but upon further reflection admits that he should have sought some self-care and mental health support for himself:

No, we have through ... the employee family assistance provider. We did not set up anything direct and they could all just call the employee family assistance provider. For myself I didn't think that I needed it. Upon reflection, I should have, for the flood I went for 41 days straight, my shortest day for the first three weeks was 18 hours that was the shortest day. I did too much and then it took a toll for sure. The murders took a toll in a different way, I thought I was okay but probably not. That's something we have talked about especially in mass casualty instance and ensure that we get that in there for first responders, for our volunteers, for the emergency operations group and the crisis management at the executive leadership. We try to emphasize self-care in our training. I have to admit we tell other people to do that and we don't do it ourselves. We need to make sure to take care of the people and the responders as well. And that also is shown in organizations that have recovered well after some horrific events, the other ones that haven't is because they started to lose people because they are not taking care.

John's comments collaborate with other participants such as Sheryl, Andy and Esther about the lack of self-care by crisis leaders. Indeed, he explains that organizations that recovered after some horrific events do so at the cost of losing their staff, if they do not have a proper self-care plan. Since self-care is so important, why then do crisis leaders neglect this aspect of crisis management knowing the implications?

## **Participant #10 Suzy**

Suzy is the deputy for the city's emergency management agency and one of the commanders for Canada's task force two. She manages a team at the emergency management agency responsible for Canada's task force two, community outreaching education, business continuity emerging issues and threats. During crises, she can either take the role of an emergency operations manager or a director of emergency management. Canada task force two is a heavy oriented search and rescue team, a team initially designed for large structural collapse, but is also an all hazards team.

### **Suzy and prior crisis experience.**

Suzy talked about some of her experiences in handling crises:

I certainly enjoy it, it's what my training is for ... it's about the reason we do these types of jobs, to be able to make a difference when something happens. I will call my experiences positive and that doesn't mean they are not without challenges in terms of work load, in terms of sleep and in terms of stress level and relationships building on the fly certainly challenging there. I will say all of my experiences have been positive and we've got a really unique organization here where we got incredible staff and incredible group of people that come together. ... A lot of our staff members have been involved in a lot of big events. They're very highly trained, they're very highly skilled and easy to lead from that perspective.

It is obvious from the interview that Suzy enjoys her job, she credits this to having a positive work environment in a unique organization where there are incredible staff and group of people.

### **Suzy and the competencies of a crisis leader.**

She then explained what she believed should be the competencies required of a crisis leader. Suzy:

The biggest things are calmness under pressure, and I think we've all been in circumstances where the tensions are running high and the decisions have a lot of weight

on them and it's so much stressful when you see a leader that's yelling or has a raised voice, seems a lot anxious about the decision. So, I think for me a lot of it has to do with, even if I'm in turmoil on the inside, not to show it on the outside. So, the team cannot translate that through to the people that are looking at me to be the calm collect voice. So, I think that's definitely one of the skills that's for the disaster response team side.

There's a need for the quick relationship building, we may be going into an area where we actually don't know anybody, don't have any existing relationships ... coming in to help them through some of the worst ... happening in that community. So, you need to be able to get the who you are ... get a foundation built quickly with people and I will also say that there is a humbleness to it in the sense that when you do go into the community, we're not there to take over, it's not our community. You have to recognize in crises the people that have it, ... that live and work in the community needs to be the ones that respond to their community and as a crises leader you have to be humble to recognize that and understand that you are not in control of everything.

There is technical competence, you have to know what you are doing in the particular field that's in crises and to be able to do that. ... [in addition], I would say ... communication and it goes back to calmness, if your communication style is to panic and yell and run its going to change the whole momentum. I think you need to balance a communication style that keeps things in perspective. We've been really lucky ... the events are really huge there's no question, the property loss ... is very high for people but we haven't lost a lot of lives. I think at the end of the day we have to remember that we're making decisions about public safety, so that people aren't impacted and don't lose their lives...

Van Wart and Kapucu (2011) explained that major crises do cause people real concern and can even cause widespread panic that can equal the disruption of the event itself. From Suzy's remarks, crisis leadership competencies should include calmness, relationship building, humbleness, technical, and communication, these competencies are people-centered to reduce the disruption and panic caused by a crisis.

Suzy described what her decision-making process was, when faced with crisis response:

It's interesting because for me I do a complete mental switch. On a day to day basis, you have a way of interacting and that's collaborative, it's a lot of different opinions. ... [When] the crisis center is open there is different expectations, there's a job I need to do, and I need to think quickly. I'm not going to have all the answers ... that's what's going through my head. ... You only gonna have 50% of the information, you're gonna have to make decisions and it's kind of hard, it's terrible when you say it but its gonna pump

yourself up; you've got this, you've been in crises before, you know preparing yourself for what is gonna happen and then I think you start to go through; what do I need to do when I get on the ground? What are my first steps? Who do I need to make sure is notified? Who isn't at the table and you on listing the very ... if you are going into another jurisdiction one of the first steps is to reach out to that jurisdiction, make contact; here's who we are, we're on our way to help you ... and sort of start that process.

She explained that her decision-making processes are the result of past experiences, routine and watching other leaders around her:

I think it's a combination of both, ... it's a combination of responding to smaller situations. And kind of getting a routine of how you and your body, and mind work responding to smaller things. I think a lot of it is also from watching those around me in crises when I've not been in leadership role and in the leadership role crisis response but not at the top part, watching how those around me are reacting and learning. You know you learn just as much from watching people react equally as you do from watching people ... I've made a very conscious effort over the years to pick and choose the good portions. I would have picked each scenario and tried to... I wouldn't get it perfectly, but I would have tried to balance those out.

Organizations are assumed to be rational, impersonal objective systems and leaders' responsibilities include keeping them that way (Fein & Isaacson, 2009). Suzy exemplifies this perspective when she does a complete mental switch to focus on a crisis by becoming rational and impersonal. Hochschild (1983) classified this mental switch as emotion work, meaning that Suzy managed her emotions to be consistent with her role as a crisis leader and her organizational behavior. I wonder if this is an effective way to manage emotions as leaders?

An aspect of crisis response she comments on is the importance of prior crisis management skills being needful in handling bigger crisis situations. This has been a recurring theme in the interviews.

The conversation then turned to processes for emergency crisis response by the city. Suzy described in detail what the processes were:

We're an agency of 60 different members and those members have the ability to reach out to anybody and say I've got a problem, I may not have the right people in the room or I need to collaborate on something or I need help and their process would be to reach out to us as an agency. We then activate whatever portion of the agency that we need to, and we do notifications and start to work on our priorities. In terms of roles, in the room everyone would have a check list that would help guide through what their specific role [for] that day, but the sort of emergency processes is the notification to our group that there is something happening in the city.

As the complexity of a crisis increases, so too, should collaborations with partner organizations. Suzy gave some details about the make-up of partner agencies:

... Every ... business unit is a member which would make up about 30-34 of our members and then we've got everybody that really needs to be at the table when something happens in the .... Jurisdiction. We got ... organizations that need to be present here for a big decision making, some of them are local companies, some of them are civic partners, some of them would be provincial, the provincial emergency management agency is a member, the wild fire group is a member and some of them would be federal, in the sense of the airport authority is one of our members, so it's kind of a really broad spectrum of people.

Suzy explained that higher education institutions were included in this partnership. She explained:

What we've done with the post-secondary institution is, we've rolled up all the post-secondary institutions together. They have to elect one person to come in and get the information for all of the post-secondary and then transmit it through the networks, so that we don't have a limited number of seats.

Crisis management agencies face challenges in critical moments of crisis response. No single challenge stands alone as Suzy explained:

Certainly, it's people's stress levels especially when you are going into a community that isn't yours. You know if you think of small communities, they've probably been personally impacted by whatever has happened; whether they've lost their homes or someone that they know has, so you're dealing with very high emotions, you're dealing with people usually that haven't slept in a long period of time. By the time the decision is made to call for assistance there is often some time that has passed, so you're dealing with all of the things that come with poor nutrition.

You're also dealing with competing priorities in some sense, you know, we tried to get everyone on the same page, what the priorities of an incident are but the reality is when you have 60 different agency members in the room, we're not always going to agree that step one is to handle this particular piece. You'll certainly encounter those, you will encounter just general response challenges. I think of the ... flood and I think of moving 88000 people, that's just a challenge itself. And especially when you look at the emergency social services side of trying to house people that don't have a secondary source, you've got a lot of different population demographics ... that it's not as simple as just opening one shelter and that can take everybody, you're mixing the homeless populations with the young family population. There's quite a bit of challenge in that.

Suzy explained that partnerships and collaborations within the city's emergency management agency involved a broad spectrum of people from the private and public sectors as well as the postsecondary institutions within the city. The broad spectrum of people is advantageous because a crisis presents many unanticipated and unexpected situations that any of these people could attend to.

### **Suzy and the crisis of the flood/wildfire.**

Suzy's initial reaction to both crises was a "ready to work" attitude. She explained that it was about figuring out the dynamics of the situation and getting ready to work:

In some ways I think it was ok, it's time to go to work. We had thought about it, we knew we had a problem coming towards the city ...and ... let's get to work and figure out what needs to be done. I think that would be my initial reaction in both circumstances because I see it as a list of tasks, in some ways when you know something is happening.

She continued explaining the city's response to the flood:

At the time we were part of the ... fire department, the organizations have split since then. I was in the fire department tactical operations coordinating from my firefighting response. In terms of personal handling. ... It was a very hard event for the city... when the community floods and you move citizens from the community, you get instant validation, ok, that was a right decision you should have moved the citizens. You almost in a lot of ways don't have time to think and reflect on it until quite a bit after.

She continued:

I think it will be a little different with [the fire] and why I say that is because it isn't our jurisdiction. ... When something happens in the city, we know right away that it's us. When the fire first started ... I know of my initial reaction was "we can help you", we've got this disaster team, move the disaster team and our focus turned to dotting all the I's and crossing all the T's to make sure the team was ready to go cause we knew for a fire like that even though we hadn't been asked yet, we knew we were going to go.

Suzy reflected on her mindset as a ready to work attitude as she begins to make sense of a crisis knowing that there may not be time for her reflect on the decisions she makes in the moment. Both the crisis of the flood and the fire were hard on both cities and the evacuation process a difficult experience but from Suzy's response, there was a validation that the cities were doing the right thing by evacuating their citizens.

The conversation turned to evacuees. Having a plan in place for evacuation is part of crisis management. Suzy talked about the process and plans for evacuation:

Yes, so we've got a complete emergency social services division, we've got two staff members that work in [the city's emergency management agency] that are responsible for all of the planning associated with emergency social services and they have a team behind them. People that volunteer in the city from their day-day job to assist in emergency social services, there's about 120 (might not be correct about the number) of them that come together when we say moving a large number of citizens. All of the plans and processes are well organized and practiced being able to get off and running quickly. The volunteers are trained, they volunteer from their city jobs to come over to us and part of that is that they participate in exercises. ... A lot of our city staff are also social workers, kind of trained in that environment as well and then we've got partnerships with emergency wellness response teams from various different organizations that bring ... house services and community builders and non-governmental organizations they gather to make sure that we've got the supports that evacuative citizens may need.

From Suzy's remarks, there are many trained volunteers who are involved in crisis response, in addition to the city's emergency personnel and partnerships. These volunteers, personnel and partnerships consist of a diverse group of people who work together toward saving human lives.

## **Suzy and collaborations/partnerships.**

Suzy discussed collaborations and her thoughts:

Certainly, the ... fires will be a great example of collaboration with the post-secondary institutions. We had evacuees in some of the other areas, but the university has been one of our great partners. ... If you look at the timing, they happen to have empty residence that looks so little ... you've got this willing structure, you've got a trained structure, you've got a process in place that can manage evacuees by putting them into existing facilities. We tend to take the view that the more you can do with the regular business practice, the more you're not setting up and trying to work through on the fly, and let's face it for an evacuee the experience is very different in a gym full of 500 people that you don't know versus we can get you a little bit of privacy, get you a different place. So, the university... has been an incredible partner for us in that. It's been going very well, we work very closely with ... the emergency management side.

There is always something to learn in the aftermath of a crisis, something to improve on and processes to refine. Suzy discussed these learnings:

I think we're always learning things from the events that happen and we're a learning organization. I think we can always continue to do things better and I think that the danger in emergency management and in this type of role is we can always look back at an event and point out everything that went wrong but when we're doing that, we have the time, we have a 100% of the information, it's a different landscape. Almost 90,000 people were moved, and the community was empowered to come together, there was information out there, that means to me that the response was successful. We hear a lot of people say to us a successful response is measured by the loss of lives, and I'm really really nervous about that correlation. There's going to be an event at some point ... that's just the odds that we're going to do everything as good as we possibly could and we're gonna lose lives. I'm really conversant that I don't want our staff to make that connection that the success of the response is based on that. I would say that there's a lot of things that we could have done differently, if we had all the information, if we had more time, if we had a slightly different circumstance. ... Communicating with the public is always a challenge. From almost any large event communication will come up as one of the areas that people will need to work on.

Suzy sounded happy with the level of collaboration between the city's emergency agency and the university. She pointed that there was a process in place that managed evacuees, a willingness to support, as well as an available and trained structure, all these moving parts were key attractions to collaborating with the university. With regards to learnings from the crisis,



Suzy was concerned with the correlation between a successful crisis response and the number of human lives lost. For me, this is troubling because losing any life is a tragedy both for the family and the community and every human life is valuable. There should be some other tool for measuring the success of a crisis response other than the loss of human life.

### **Suzy and crisis communication.**

Suzy highlighted the importance of having the media as a partner:

The biggest things to highlight is that we look at the media as one of our partners. Without the media we can't actually get the effective message out to the citizens. So, there's a lot of organizations that look at the media as an enemy and that is not us, they are our partner, they have a need for info and we have a responsibility to provide that info. We do our best to get them what they need, [we] make it an easy process for them, make it a comfortable process for them. We have our crises communications team ... that we activate when something happens in the room for example during the flood there were 30 individuals that would be working at any one time on crises communications and that's everything from twitter channels to other social media to updating employees ... its very communication focused. The interesting thing I think we're starting to see is the faster public communication is happening the expectations of our agencies is higher, so we could have the text book response to something and if we don't communicate about it correctly, it's going to be seen as a failure by outside agencies and internal ones ... So, communication has almost become that instant focus that needs to happen.

She continued:

There's a crisis leader and she's here on a day-day basis and she's got a team, I think there's almost a hundred of the communicators that also get trained to do crises communications in that room. When that room is opened and operating, the communications all get signed off all of the relevant agencies have a look at them so that if I am talking about something the... police is doing, the police is the one that's providing the information. That's a very collaborative process to ensure we don't have one group out here saying 'stay, shelter in place' and one group saying 'evacuate' and another group saying something different. You know we really try to bring everybody together and have a common message.

Establishing and maintaining equal relationships and partnership with groups and organizations is critical to effective crisis communication. These relationships and partnerships

should be created long before a crisis hits (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2011). From Suzy's response, I gathered that relationships and partnerships have been ongoing, and is collaborative as messages from the media and the police are synchronized before it gets to the public.

### **Suzy and training.**

Suzy explained that there were leadership and training courses available for crisis preparation:

... Certainly, there's training course to make sure you understand the technical, the organizational side, there's leadership courses. I think a lot of it is knowing yourself and knowing yourself well enough to know first of all, how am I going to react and what do I need now. There are key things that I need as a leader to be able to stay calm, to be able to get my head going on something, whether that's a checklist, whether I need to do the first by piece and ... whether I need to grab a cup of coffee before I start. I think it's different for everyone and I think the biggest importance is understanding who you are and what you need and where your values are and keep that consistent throughout.

Suzy also discussed training and her thoughts. She recalled the process of crisis management team pairing and the logic behind these pairings:

It's really hard to simulate crises leadership. If you think of training as an exercise, it's not the same, it's not real and we're really do our best to make it a real environment, in reality it isn't. I think that's why the leadership courses are focused on who you are, understanding the teams that's around you and we do a real decision here where we try to march. For example, for the fire our two commanders that were put in place, we'll put two different skill sets in there, so for me I'm much more list driven, I'm much more task driven, I'm very calm but I'm not as good as building relationships on the fly as some of my other team members. They'll be good at the relationships side not necessarily the task side, so we'll try to marry the two of us up and send the two of us in so that both pieces are happening at the same time.

Training and simulation exercises are not the real thing as Suzy pointed out, however, she explained that an understanding of your personality, your values and being self-aware are important skills during crisis response.

### **Suzy and selfcare/mental health care.**

In conclusion, Suzy talked about self-care and mental health practices with the emergency management agency:

We certainly have mental readiness program, where we'll try to prepare our staff as best as we can to try to go into the areas prior to things happening. We have pre-routines that are happening when we are in the area where people need support in that way. We try to keep connections. I think of myself when I'm in that role, the connections at home with my peer network support, network perspective, we keep that a very open dialogue and a very responsive dialogue to have especially if you're in a role where you're making decisions ... if you need another brain to help you with the decision, I know I can always phone home and have a conversation with my boss about what decision I'm thinking about.

Certainly, disaster response doesn't lend itself well to while your exercising. You eat crappy food and usually you eat way more sugar than you normally would and you sleep in a cot, you are working longer hours that usually lines up to people, when they get home ensuring that there's days off before people come back to work, they don't land home and come back to work the next day. We do have professional psychologists, and psychiatrists that are accessible through our employee systems program that can help those that need to chat. Then certainly, from my perspective, it's getting back to my regular routine as fast as I can and that's starting to eat properly again, I'm a great runner and use running as a great stress relief.

Suzy's explained that connections at home, peer network support, very open and responsive dialogue, professional psychologists, and psychiatrists form the support systems for self-care. For her, running is the best self-care she indulges in. With all the numerous resources listed by Suzy, I wonder how many employees make use of these resources without prompting from senior leaders?

### **Participant #11 Nora**

Nora is the vice principal in an elementary school in the city. She worked with the principal and teachers in receiving students that were evacuated during the crisis of the fire. Her school received 115 students over a three-day period. The school was unprepared, lacked

adequate resources and staff. She reported not seeing any collaboration between the university and the elementary school even though evacuated families who were housed on campus had kids going to the elementary school.

**Nora, the crisis of the wildfire and the evacuees at the elementary school.**

Nora recounted receiving students whose families were staying at the university residence:

In May 2016, over the course of a three - day period, we received over 115 students whose families were staying at the university. ... I don't know if there was something happening in the university's end to direct families to our school to do registration, but all we saw from our end were the families coming in and doing their registration. I think over the course of the seven weeks or so that we had them, we saw evidence of things that were happening at the university to help them with basic needs and resources but in terms of getting them settled in registration, transportation and that kind of stuff, it didn't feel like there was a collaboration there. ... Although, I understand that they were doing some additional sort of information sessions and programs for the kids there [university], it was not part of our communication with the university of what they were doing.

Nora recalled the demographic of the students they had received:

... We had a school of 360 kids to a school of 475 kids and many were newer to Canada families and most didn't know each other. So, the kids who came ... weren't from the same schools, they weren't from the same communities, one of the community partners that we did work with, because we already had an existing relationship with them ... brought down an Elder and a young man who does work with community groups from one of the First Nations. ... They had been brought out of their community, they lost their homes, they came down and they did storytelling and drama and visual arts with our kids around home and about being displaced and about belonging and that kind of thing and that was a really nice piece...

Nora's comments are in line with John's comments about the different demographics received at the university. There was a high influx of students to the school that made logistics a nightmare. Examples of logistics faced were student registration, transportation to school, extra classrooms and hiring more teachers. From the tone of the conversation, it can be implied the school did the best they could to make the students feel comfortable and welcome.

In the first two weeks of receiving the evacuees into the elementary school, the school had so many questions but few answers. They needed to resolve logistics issues as quickly as possible to make transition and learning easy for these kids who were traumatized by the crisis of the fire. Nora explained in detail:

I think on the first day we had 60 registrants and we invented a process at the school and then we sort out clarifications. We just asked questions as it arose, we would just start firing off, are we registering them as new ... students, are we registering them as continuing? How are we registering them? Parents who don't have documentation, we were registering them anyway, if they have no birth certificate or ID? Can we hire a teacher? Can we have furniture? We needed to order 115 more desks, all the little logistical things, and then as we went we had some revisions, so they went back and said you need to go back and add all these to their registration forms, this code and then enter that into our student information system. I think the first week they arrived was the first provincial achievement test, so the question was are we requiring our grade six students to write? Are we giving them the choice? And then the province said they were not required to write, giving the parents the choice, some of them wrote, some of them didn't. Mostly, we were just inventing it as we went and then revising after the fact.

Crisis brings many unforeseeable challenges, especially, if institutions of learning had not dealt with prior crisis events that included relocating and settling evacuees. Nora explained they were overwhelmed with the sudden influx of students in great numbers. They had several challenges to deal with, such as inadequate resources and personnel in addition to community donations to the fire victims. They were barely managing to control the situation and they didn't reach out to the university for support and resources. Nora highlighted this challenge and others:

For us the fact that the kids were staying in a safe place, with their families, with their community, it was a quick transportation for them to come over to us and they came with lunch. The lunch was really both positive for them and eventually negative because they came with these big cardboard boxes and they didn't necessarily like what was in it but the fact that were coming with what they needed for the school day was helpful. We didn't reach out to the university for collaboration because we were just barely keeping afloat ourselves. We were trying to manage 'who are the kids, who are the parents, what is their contact information'. We were hiring, we had to hire three teachers, interview, clean out storage closets, make them into classrooms, receive furniture, change our timetable so that the kids could have music, change everyone else's timetable. We had

people from the board of education who were doing trauma work with the teachers so that they could support the students and then at the same time we had this influx of people wanting to give us things.

People wanted to give clothes, and books and sports equipment and food and tickets to performances and all these things we had no way of managing because all we could manage was contact information, bus routes, you know, getting the kids in and stable and learning. So, I think, when I read through the questions before I came, the biggest thing that may have helped with resources and services would be, if we could have off loaded some of those community resources and community response to the university. I just don't think we had a relationship that we knew how to do that or who would take it or if was their role or what, and in that sort of survival mode we kept turning people away and then people would be annoyed with us. In fact one organization had a truck with clothing that they wanted the families to come shop and we said no that we can't manage it, they showed up anyway out front of the school and all of these families trying to get their basic needs met at a school is just not manageable, I mean it could have been manageable if we had had a plan ahead but all of our resources were going into learning.

She continued the discussion with the challenges, community involvement and donations to the evacuees:

They may have gone to the university as well. ... We were in the news and other schools were talking ... and so there was this sense of needing to come and help. So, at the beginning we said yes, we took back packs for all the kids with school supplies, and that was great. Even that just figuring out how many kids or even the drop-off even the distribution, they were all like one-hour task, but they add up in a short time frame, making it difficult. So, yea, the clothing was a community thing, there were kids out front wanting to give us tickets. Again, great, but that meant communicating to parents, can you go to this show at this time, would you like tickets, can you come get the tickets. We felt like we were shortchanging our kids by not making those opportunities and by a few weeks in, we could have managed that but then the offers weren't there. The first two weeks were just like staffing, making space, figuring who the kids were, teaching them the school routines, and it was at a time when, like it's May and June, the kids are writing provincial exams, so what's happening, are the kids from the fire ready to write the exams? Are they not? Thinking about end of year report card, what has been reported? To whom? About what? that was our big work.

Nora described a spectrum of challenges and reactions, ranging from media attention, excess donations, shortage of staff to limited classroom space, but she also demonstrated pride and satisfaction in the achievements of doing the best they could to host the students.

### **Nora and collaborations/partnerships.**

Nora talked about the possibility of having some sort of collaboration in information sharing and communication between the elementary school and the university for future occurrences of these types of situations:

So, I was thinking of this before I came down and I think the biggest idea would be if the university was the hub for all the community resources and there was a way of really simply and clearly communicating to us, who the contact person was, what kind of things they need, what kind of things they have, that we could just shift some of those community things to. The other thing, so a lot of the crises management was information management, right, so keeping track of who are the kids, what school did they belong to, ... when have they moved on, so that was the piece, are the families moved away from the university, when they had families to go to or when the university put surplus kids at ... and then we needed to reroute a bus to go get them ... because they didn't realize that them moving the location meant we had to make a whole new bus route, get another driver. So, it's tough, because on one hand they can't communicate about individual student needs with us, that needs to be with the parents, but even if there is a way of triangulating information... they are managing all these concerns and logistics, if they knew there was a person at the university they could leave information with, that they had release of information to give to us, I don't know how feasible it is but some way of triangulating, is the family gone? is the child safe?

So, we had one situation early on, we had a student ... with Autism, and he needed specialized programming and he came, and we made arrangements for him to be part of our special class and he needed complex transportation, we got it all set up and then he didn't come to school, he came to school for a few days and then he stopped coming to school and we stopped hearing from the family, and we didn't know if he was okay, what was going on, it turns out that his mother died ... just suddenly in the night and the family had packed up and moved back ... the only reason we knew that was because their neighbors ... also had kids at our school and they told us and in that circumstance the last thing the family would have thought about would be to call us, but it also could have been that the child was transported to the wrong school or they were lost or there was something going happening on and we didn't have any way of following up. So, if there's any sort of backup system of communication that would help.

Nora felt that having some sort of partnership and relationship with the university would have been beneficial:

I think if there had been sort of a face and a name to the person who's coordinating efforts at the university that would have helped. I think it would be nice maybe not right

at the onset. The whole process was a huge upheaval for us and you learn a lot by solving the problems that arose. I think it would have been interesting later on in the process to sort of compare notes and think through it, like for us as well, that if we are in the same situation again, what will we do differently? ... I don't know who paid for everything, if the Board of Education paid for the three teachers, we had extra secretaries who came to do the registration, I don't know who paid for that.

Pre-existing networks and partnerships provide slack reservoirs of organizational resources to support flexible solutions to unanticipated problems (Nohrstedt, Bynander, Parker & 't Hart, 2018). These pre-existing networks and partnerships can provide support in the acute phase of crisis management. From the conversation with Nora, it is inferred that there were no pre-existing networks between the university and the elementary school as the school struggled to find their bearing and cope with the challenges of hosting the evacuated students. Nora suggested that in the future the university could act as the hub for all community resources, triangulate information and provide support with logistics since the students were living on the university residence.

When asked about how effectively the crisis evacuation situation was handled, Nora pointed out the sense of collective shared responsibility was strong, however, communication was a challenge:

There was definitely a collective, there was a sense of shared responsibility and it was an effortful undertaking, everyone sort of chirped in and were eager to help. I think the families seemed settled and were cared for. One thing that was not clear and I don't know if it was a university thing was or the Board of Education thing was, we didn't know we were getting kids. We heard on the news that they were moving to the university, we called our area director and said okay if these kids are moving to university, are they coming to our school? And he said I don't know, I don't know where the communication broke down, if it was within the board or between the university and the board and but no one ever officially communicated with our school to say, we are opening our doors to X number of people, ... so that would be one piece and the other piece would be just around the contact and community resource, if there was a way to say you guys do all that and we will do the learning.



She continued:

One thing that we were really trying to do as a school was make each child feel known and feel like they mattered, that their time with us was important, it was important to us, it was important to them and our community and that story just stayed within our school and that would have been something I would have like to have connected with the university to say, you guys did this and this is what we did and together we did something worthwhile.

Nora concluded:

No, everyone was gone, as they left, we had to collapse the classes and release the teachers as well. ...One thing that caught me by surprise in the middle of it, was that our teachers, our community teachers had a collective melt down about two weeks in, we were having a staff meeting at the end of the school day and ... they were like crying and really venting some big concerns and they talked about the fact that we had all this stand up meetings, all these extra communications, and then all of the adjustments of the extra kids on the playground and the lunch and the disruptions to the schedule. At the end we said but you can do all those things, you have done all these things, what is the actual problem, what they ended up naming was that they were grieving the loss of the sort of celebratory time in May and June, where everything with the kids sort of comes together and they see the growth and they celebrate their accomplishments and have those fun good byes. They said their May and June felt like September and October and they didn't get that time with their kids and it hadn't occurred to me but once they voiced it, it was legitimate.

In Nora's opinion, there was a collective sense of shared responsibility, care, and welcome. She felt that the school did the best they could under the strenuous circumstances. However, she pointed out that communication was a major challenge as there was no prior information regarding hosting the evacuated students in their elementary school. This seems to have been an issue in the crisis of the flood as well, as John confirmed that they were unaware they were hosting evacuees. There was obviously some sort of gap in communication between all parties involved in relocating and hosting evacuees. In addition, perhaps the university's faculty representative on the board of the elementary school could serve as a coordinator and create liaisons between both schools.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented eleven narratives in rich thick descriptions by the participants within the study. The narratives were presented in themes obtained from key elements of their story. These key elements highlighted the participants roles in crisis response, prior crisis response experiences, crisis, crisis communication, collaborations and partnerships, training, self-care and mental health of leaders. The following chapter discusses the themes extracted from the key elements of the research data.

## **Chapter Five: The Discussion**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how higher education senior leaders responded to human-made and natural crisis. I utilized a narrative inquiry approach to collect data through semi-structured interviews of eleven individuals in senior leadership positions. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. I personally transcribed all the interviews, this process allowed me to acquire a sense of intimacy with my participants, as well as know when I had reached saturation through the common themes that emerged from the interviews. During the transcribing, I observed groups of similar concepts appearing in the form of similar answers. Once the data was in the form of field texts, I decided to start ‘reading between the lines’ to decode the field texts obtained according to an interpretive process that took me through a thematic analysis of my participant’s stories in order to describe and reflect their individual circumstances and perceptions. Through this type of analysis, several patterns and themes begin to emerge. In addition, I made summaries of participants answers to questions asked as I compared their points of view. Direct quotes from participants were included for a better interpretation of results and confirmation of the validity of themes.

After reviewing the transcripts and conducting an analysis of the data for this research, seven interrelated themes emerged which include: (a) that a crisis team’s composition, roles, and responsibilities had an impact on crisis response; (b) that developing the required crisis leadership competencies was important for a successful crisis response; (c) what the university’s role in responding to the flood, wildfire and students’ murders was; (d) the importance of collaborations/partnerships during crisis response; (e) the interconnectedness of crisis communication and a university’s reputation; (f) that constant training exercises can be

beneficial but can also cause training fatigue; and (g) that leaders tended to overlook their self-care and mental health both during and after a crisis.

In this chapter, I present the research questions, an overview of the study and a discussion of the seven interrelated themes from the findings. These themes are presented in combination with existing literature. The existing literature served as a source of interpretation and analysis in the discussion for a rich, and in-depth picture.

This research study sought to answer the following research question:

How do senior leaders in a large western higher education institution respond to unpredictable human-made and natural crises?

### **Overview**

The research explored higher education leaders' response to crises. Participants were candid and forthcoming in their responses during interviews, as they shared their stories and challenges faced in dealing with crises response. A crisis is an event that can happen unexpectedly, it could be a natural disaster or human-made as mentioned in chapter two. Two main characteristics of a crisis are its suddenness, and unexpected occurrences. In the context of higher education, a crisis could be anything that threatens the institution in terms of lives, reputation, structures, facilities, its everyday operations of knowledge generation and knowledge building. During these times of crisis, regular daily operations are suspended, and the institution goes into crisis management mode. To deal with crises disruptions, capable leaders are required, and are integral to the crisis management process. Responses from higher education leaders suggest that the makeup of a crisis management team, prior crisis management experiences and

competencies were crucial to handling any type of crisis. The themes from the responses are discussed below extensively.

### **Crisis Teams Composition, their Roles, Responsibilities and Impact on Crisis Response**

Coombs (1999) defined a crisis management team as a cross-functional group of people within the organization who have been designated to handle any crisis. Barton (1993) further explained that the team may consist of individuals from senior administration, technical operations, public affairs, public relations, consumer affairs, investor relations, and advertising. In other words, the crisis management team should involve personnel from all departments within the organization. Van Der Haar, Jehn and Segers (2009) explained that this diverse make-up of crisis management teams provides for a multidisciplinary action team. This enables them to perform in a reliable and effective way as quickly as possible during a crisis. Furthermore, Barton (1993) explained that having different personnel allowed the organization to effectively respond to a myriad of audiences when faced with a corporate crisis. Responses from educational leaders in the institution studied, indicated that there was a crisis management team and the model practiced collaborated with what was in literature (Barton, 1993; Smith, 2000), however, there was a slight variation to the model found in the literature (Barton, 1993; Smith, 2000). The higher education institution that I studied has a Crisis Management Team (CMT), an Emergency Operation Group (EOG) and First Responders (FRs) made up of campus security, emergency wardens and emergency responders. The higher education institution structure is consistent with the literature (Barton, 1993; Smith, 2000), and allows the institution access to a wide source of expertise and human resources. In addition, the makeup of these teams encouraged the delegation of specific responsibilities by each team lead during a crisis.

The difference amongst these three teams were in responsibilities and duties. The CMT was activated for crises. The CMT operated at a high strategic and policy level. Part of their role was to manage crises from an institutional, financial, operational and reputational lens, and having the overarching responsibility and goal of guiding the institution through any crisis. The EOG was made up of a large group of people responsible for the operations side of managing crises. The EOG are the functional and tactical group activated for emergencies and act as a support to the crisis management team. The FRs attend to most of the small crisis incidents in the institution and were front level responders. In terms of decision-making during crises response and management, all three teams reported to the university President and Board of Governors who took the final decisions and led the university through the crises (personal communication, by the University President at the time).

In terms of the composition of these individual teams, responses suggest that the makeup of each team was not necessarily based on their expertise in crisis management but based on their expertise and experiences in their different leadership portfolio. With regard to the CMT, their portfolios included the provost/vice president academic, vice president research, vice provost student experience, associate vice president risk and vice presidents of finance and services, general counsel, facilities, university relations, risk portfolio, and development alumni engagement. A shared leadership structure exists, and members are diverse in expertise, experience, and familiarity with crisis response. Their expertise and prior crisis response experiences ranged from no prior experiences before joining the team to more than ten years of experience. Each member of the team is tasked with the responsibility of providing knowledge in their area of know-how during crisis response and playing to their strengths.

Birnbaum (2004) referred to these types of leadership structures as “soft” (or interactional) encompassing the systems of social connections and interactions in an organization (p.10). This leadership process is dynamic, multi-directional, and a collective activity that is mutually enacted (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003). As such the influence in these teams is fluid and often reciprocal as team members take on the tasks for which they are most suited or motivated to accomplish. Bligh, Pearce and Kohles (2006) explained that influence not only flows vertically, but also horizontally. According to one participant, Jane Smith:

I would say the great thing about our crisis management team ... is [that]everyone has an equal role outside of the leader and the expectation in that room is that everyone brings their experience and their thoughts to bear at the table.

In Podolak (2002) the crisis management team is the organizational backbone for crisis planning and response. Although these teams have highly skilled members cooperating to perform urgent, unpredictable, interdependent and highly consequential tasks (Klein, Ziegert, Knight & Xiao, 2006), I found six setbacks and disadvantages in the institution I investigated with this structure. Six setbacks I found in my study, which were mentioned by the respondents: (a) there was a lack of prompt internal communication between teams; (b) the teams lacked team continuity during long crises; (c) there were tensions between balancing the job of continuing the academic mission of the university and crisis response; (d) the collaborative nature of these teams tended to lead to slow decision making; (e) it was difficult to capture and update crisis management processes in an emergency response manual; and (f) it was also difficult to make quick decisive decisions based on limited information available during a crisis. According to Andy, one of the participants in this study,

...You need that post-mortem, so you can actually chronicle what you did and evaluate, [if you] could have done it better ... so that you now have a binder you can refer to and say

let's implement the flood mitigation plan...I think that's where probably where a lot of stuff is lost, you do it and do it well. You talk about what we could have done better but then no one really captures it in a standard form that can be used in the next situation.

Another participant Sheryl explained:

...One of the learnings ...was, how do you balance the importance of continuing your academic mission at the same time that you are managing a crisis.

Ann explained:

... when you [are] dealing with a crisis and you have people, everyone is coming into a crisis with their own worldview and their own perceptions of what actions should or should not be taken and sometimes we get stuck in the consultative process, that kind of spins around and around and at the end of the day we haven't made a decision.

These responses are consistent with findings in other studies which suggested that during a crisis, insufficient time, information, resources, procedural conflict, and changing organizational expectations were some setbacks encountered (Hirokawa & Keyton 1995; Stern, 2009). Additionally, information scarcity, and striking an appropriate balance in reaching an agreement and conflict during deliberations could affect crisis teams (Hirokawa & Keyton 1995; Stern, 2009). Stern (2009) explained further that firm information about the problem(s) at hand, and potential viable solutions to them, are in short supply as a crisis breaks out. In dealing with these setbacks, Stern (2009) suggested identifying the crucial setbacks and putting others (within and outside the organization) to work to reduce them.

### **The Importance of Developing the Required Crisis Leadership Competencies**

Crisis leadership competencies are particularly relevant in managing policies, strategies, human resource functions and outcomes when crises occurs (Denis, Lamothe & Langley, 2001; Wang & Belardo, 2005). Crisis competencies are defined as the knowledge, skills, or abilities required to successfully complete crisis response, and an understanding of the context for executing the crisis management strategy (Yusko & Goldstein, 1997). Deitchman (2013)



emphasized that competencies must be complemented by skills in coordination and in management of human resources. Responses from the study indicated that all educational leaders were aware of what competencies were required to function as a crisis leader and they were actively practicing these competencies. Twenty-one different competencies were identified by educational leaders in my study. These competencies included the ability to be calm under crisis, which was a key theme echoed by almost every educational leader interviewed. Calmness was viewed as important especially when dealing with people as tensions and distress levels are high in an emotionally intense crisis. Dubrin (2013) encouraged leaders to remain calm under crisis conditions since this contributes to leader effectiveness during response and helps group members cope with the situation.

Emotional empathy was an interesting response as some educational leaders believed that having emotional empathy, the ability to feel the other person's emotions was a required competence for a crisis leader. In situations where people are displaced from their homes, jobs, or even the loss of human lives, a crisis leader with emotional empathy could connect with such a person(s) on a deep level. Another suggestion was that the crisis leader was required to be humble. I grouped all the crisis leadership competencies that emerged from the narratives of the educational leaders interviewed in the study into three categories (a) competencies of the response team (b) individual leadership qualities or competencies (c) individual personal qualities or competencies. When leaders are selected to work in crisis management teams, their selection criteria should include a display of most of these competencies.

(a) The competencies of the response team are important skills that the CMT as a group should possess. These competencies are important team requirements for the effectiveness of

crisis response. These competencies include technical know-how in relation to the leaders' portfolio, prior experience in crisis response, the ability to put together a competent team, the ability to logistical handle the resolution of a crisis, the team must possess deep knowledge of institutional processes and be able to practice, receive training and be prepared to handle any crisis. The crisis management team should be organised in a way that the team collectively possess all the listed crisis response competencies above. As McGuire, Brudney and Gazley (2010) suggested the availability of education and training, diverse participation, and professionalization of operational functions were key ingredients for the success of crisis response.

(b) Individual leadership qualities or competencies are the individual abilities or qualities that a crisis leader should possess. These leadership competencies state that a crisis leader should be flexible, should be decisive, should be an effective communicator, should be open to new possibilities and ideas, should be a good relationship builder, should be able to process information quickly and accurately and should be able to direct people who need support to the right service and right place.

(c) Individual personal qualities or competencies are internal, inward facing and individual qualities or competencies possessed by an individual crisis leader. These personal individual crisis leadership competencies state that a crisis leader needs to approach a crisis in a calm manner, possess self-control and should ideally be humble in the face of others. In addition, the crisis leader should be capable of listening carefully to what others are saying, possess empathy for others, be trustworthy and give the impression of being trustworthy, and a crisis leader should be thoughtful and compassionate.

It is interesting to note that all leaders interviewed believed they had demonstrated some of these competencies in some way during crises. Incidentally, all competencies listed can be learned through training and consistent practice. In table two below, I listed the crisis leadership competencies that emerged from the narratives of the educational leaders interviewed in the study. I categorized the competencies into competencies of the response team (Group), individual leadership competencies and individual personal competencies. See table two below.

Table 2

*Crisis Leadership Competency Table*

<b>Competencies of the response team (Group)</b>	<b>Individual leadership competencies</b>	<b>Individual personal competencies</b>
Possesses technical know-how in relation to the leaders' portfolio	Demonstrates the ability to be flexible	Approaches a crisis in a calm manner
Prioritizes experience in relation to crisis response	Demonstrates the ability to be decisive	Demonstrates self-control
Possesses the ability to put together a competent team	Demonstrates the ability to be an effective communicator	Demonstrates humility in the face of others
Possesses the ability to logistical handle the resolution of a crisis	Demonstrates the ability to be open to new possibilities and ideas	Demonstrates the ability to listen carefully to what others are saying,
Possesses deep knowledge of institutional processes	Demonstrates the ability to be a good relationship builder	Displays empathy for others.
Possesses the ability to be ready to practice, receive training and be prepared for crisis response	Demonstrates the ability to process information quickly and accurately	Demonstrates the ability to be trustworthy and give the impression of being trustworthy
	Demonstrates the ability to be able to direct people who need support to the right service and right place.	Displays thoughtfulness to others
		Shows compassion to others
		Demonstrates self-care and mental health care

Van Wart and Kapucu (2011) found similar competencies in their research when they interviewed senior emergency managers in administrative leadership positions in the business sector. They identified fifteen competencies that these crisis leaders considered important. The identification of crisis leadership competencies could be useful information for training programs, the selection of business simulations, and managerial coaching sessions (Wang & Belardo, 2005; Yusko & Goldstein, 1997).

### **The University's Role in Responding to the Flood, Wildfire and Students Murders**

This research study focused on three different types of crises: a flood, murders and a major wildfire. The educational leaders were asked about their initial reactions and responses to the three types of crisis encountered by the university, especially in an institution that had no previous experience in handling crisis on such a large scale. The responses from these educational leaders included feeling: *overwhelmed, horrified, alarmed, sad, terrible, care and concern for individuals involved in the crisis, helpless, and inadequate*. The participants described these reactions in response to the magnitude of destruction of property and loss of human lives in some of these crises. Responding to crises in higher education can be a delicate and complicated issue, involving several factors that may impact the planning, response and recovery from each crisis. These factors included reputational issues, providing housing for internally displaced people, community support, closure and evacuation of the campus, and the constant motion of the campus. It is important to note that none of the crises experienced by the higher education institution took place on the campus premises; however, all three of the crises had major impacts on the institution. In the sections that follow I discuss insights gained from educational leaders on the three categories of crises studied for this study.

### **The flood.**

The crisis of the flood was a citywide crisis that made a large and unexpected impact on the university. Responses from the interviewees revealed that the university was taken by surprise by the flood and was not prepared for the impact that occurred in terms of closing the campus and housing evacuees. University leaders decided to close the campus because the city had issued a ‘no work day’ decision due to the flooding. Although the campus was not affected by the flood, they were required to obey the mandate of the municipality and close the university because they were a part of the community. The institution was impacted from this shutdown, which created many operational issues for faculty, staff and students such as managing experiments on campus, informing faculty and students not to come into school, and having crisis management done over the phone rather than in person. In addition, this was the first major crisis of this scale that the university was forced to handle. The participants were united in suggesting that the university was not adequately prepared for this crisis. According to one of the participants Martha,

We made the decision to close the campus during the floods. We had some operational issues that we have never dealt with before, in terms of who was still allowed to be on campus... it was everything from having to inform researchers that they can't come into campus, if they've got experiments running, how they were going to manage those, how we were going to manage our animals, feeding, and cage cleaning and all those kinds of things for a campus closed in.

Spellings, Price and Modzeleski (2009) pointed out that a higher institution campus is alive and engaged with activity almost around the clock. At any one time, students, faculty, and staff are dispersed around the campus in classrooms, common areas, cafeterias, offices, dormitories, and numerous other facilities. Closing the campus highlighted the deficits the university had, and this was a big learning curve for all involved. The closure meant that much of

the crisis management by the educational leaders was done over the phone because leaders could not come into work. Having conversations and making strategic decisions over the phone meant that there were no visual cues to the team's reactions to conversations and decisions. Leaders had to learn to be clear and explicit in their communication. Other issues that arose were the cancellation of exams, a lack of a tracking system for events happening on campus, the cancellation of events held on campus, and internal communications with researchers, faculty, staff and students as to why the campus was closing. One participant Cynthia explained,

I think the flood highlighted some of the deficit in our processes, I will [tell] you one example... we had different systems for booking space on campus, we had one for booking classrooms, one for conference and events, faculties had their own... so we needed to know who had events on campus, there was a couple of conferences, as an institution we did not know the full extent of who was on campus.

The literature explained that due to the complex and often widely dispersed decentralized organizational structures and academic departments, logistical and operational problems may arise during crisis response in higher education (Spellings, Price & Modzeleski, 2009).

### **The wildfire and the flood.**

Most higher institutions have open access and often are geographically integrated in the surrounding community (Spellings, Price & Modzeleski, 2009) and these communities look to these institutions for support during crises. A study conducted by Bishop (2013), found that community members expected responses from educational leaders because of their positions within the community. The insights of the information gleaned from the educational leaders interviewed concurred with the research mentioned above. For example, the city called upon the university for their support to host evacuees of both the flood and the wildfires. Responses from educational leaders showed that one of the university's principles was to be an "anchoring

institution” and a leader in the community. This anchoring support and leadership included providing support to the community. The support required by the city was that of housing for internally displaced people. Spellings, Price and Modzeleski (2009) pointed out that campuses include residential facilities in which students live throughout the year, and sometimes even resemble small towns with the full extent of services in their vicinity (i.e., medical centers, sports complexes, residential centers, businesses), thus the university was the right choice to host these displaced people. The university was willing to host and welcomed all internally displaced people. According to Sheryl one of the participants, “there was never any question or worry about what we would do, we would take people into our residences.”

Hosting internally displaced people came with its own peculiar challenges. For example, the crisis of the flood was the first time the university was required to host a large number of evacuees. One of the participants John explained that “during the flood, it was much more of crisis because we hadn’t done it before and largely because of the demographic”. Challenges encountered according to the information gleaned included the demographics of the displaced population, the kinds of support required by this demographic, as these were mainly people from the shelters and drop in centers. In addition, emergency operation staff were required to work long hours, funding was needed for feeding the evacuees, and overall, the university underestimated the needs of the displaced population. This unfortunately turned into a mini crisis for the university and leaders ended up seeking support from the city. According to John,

We got a very different demographic which turned into our own crisis. Because it was primarily from the shelters and drop in centers in the streets, they were the bulk of the people that we got. ...we also got no support and we don’t have the same support facilities as the drop-in center does.

During the crisis of the wildfires, when the province requested that the university host evacuees, information gathered from participants revealed that the university had taken the learnings from the flood, made it into a strength and were better prepared to host the evacuees. In addition, responses show that the demographics for the fire were different, mainly families who had nowhere else to go. John explained,

We ended up getting evacuees ... We had been through the flood and had all those experiences...now we have all the learnings from that in place, so it was a much smoother operation. And it was just housing, shelter and feeding operation. Our demographic were mainly families.

As smooth as the operation was, there were questions about: how long the evacuees were to live on campus, and when to move them to other accommodations off campus. Other questions included the types of programs to be created for the evacuees' children, how these children could continue schooling, and what to do with the donations received from citizens.

### **The murders of several university students.**

Violent behavior often occurs in unexpected places and under hard-to-predict circumstances (Jenson, 2007). Such was the case when several university students were murdered in a residential area off campus grounds; the impact was deeply emotional, the consequences devastating and long-lasting to the campus and the larger community. Participants in the study reported feeling: *a sense of disbelief, shock, a sense of immense sadness, horror and feelings of helplessness*. The impact of these murders is still felt years after at the university. Information collected clearly indicated that in navigating the wake of the murders, educational leaders engaged in dealing with the crisis by putting their emotions aside. They described trying to piece together information and going through the process of sense making about what had taken place. Because the murders had happened off campus and early in the morning,



educational leaders were initially not sure if the murders involved university students, but this information was later confirmed.

In the first few hours following the crisis, information sharing, and crisis response took place between emergency services, the police and the university leaders. Three things to note from the information gathered from the interviews were (1) the murders happened on the night of a big university event, which caused an initial concern and fear that the incident was related to that event. There was a huge debate among the crisis management team whether to cancel the event, however, the president of the university intervened deciding that the decision should not be taken until consultations with the police were done. Eventually, the police dispersed those concerns and fear as they informed the university that the murders had nothing to do with the event; (2) there was a debate by the crisis management team about what the university could do in terms of providing an avenue for people to grieve; and (3) the incident happened at the start of exams.

Leaders on campus endeavored to “quickly move into a response to the situation” (Andy). Crisis response and decisions were driven by a sense of sensitivity, care, and concern for the families, students and broader community. There was pressure to make the right choices in this high stakes’ situation. The focus of the university, according to the participants in this study, was connecting with the families of the university students first and foremost, providing support for the community who knew the victims and supporting the broader community. The president of the university spoke at a police news media broadcast to bring some level of comfort and consolation to the families and public. In addition, the university was being socially responsive to the mental well-being and wellness of the faculty, students and staff of the university.

Chaplains and a team of counselors were brought in to provide faculty, staff, and students with the required emotional support especially for students who were experiencing survivor guilt. Further responses included visiting the families of the victims and attending the funerals for the murdered students; all rules about exams were canceled and students had the opportunity to choose either to do an exam or have it deferred. In addition, a vigil was held on the same day of the murders at the university and a year later a memorial service was held for the victims. This crisis was a difficult one to handle because it was emotionally intense and involved the tragic loss of young lives.

Leaders reported facing several challenges in this crisis. These challenges included understanding what their role was versus the role of the police and the emergency management systems of the university. Another challenge was the inability to release the names of the affected students. Leaders were expected to comply with police procedures regarding the release of names of the affected students. The university was criticized for not releasing the names on time while these names were already in circulation on social media. This proved to be a reputational risk to the university due to all the media attention generated because of this incident. However, the leaders emphasized the importance of not releasing the murdered students' names earlier because they needed confirmation from the affected families and the police. In addition, it was important to show respect, sensitivity and consideration to the affected families due to the traumatic nature of the crisis by not publishing the murdered students' names before consultation and approval from them.

In addition, this crisis brought up the importance of mental health and well-being for students, faculty and staff. Giggie (2015) encouraged campuses to create procedures to address

mental health concerns and have a comprehensive and coordinated mental health service particularly in the present time with the increase of school shootings. Information gleaned from the interviews revealed that the university was in the process of assessing its mental health needs and services just before the murders of the students. This crisis led the university to strengthen its mental health strategy by creating and implementing several programs targeted at mental health and wellness of students, faculty and staff.

### **The Importance of Collaborations/Partnerships during Crisis Response**

Responses from educational leaders revealed that there were two types of collaborations that happened during major crises (a) external collaborations with external partners; and (b) internal collaborations with faculty, staff, and students.

#### **External collaborations.**

When an entire society is affected by a large disaster, the range of various needs will activate numerous actors requiring diverse organizations and individuals to collaborate effectively and quickly (Anderson, 2018; Uhr, 2017). Most times these actors have varying degrees of familiarity with one another and may not have planned for the conditions they face (Anderson, 2018). Collaborative relationships are purposive (Schrage, 1990). Across the interviews, educational leaders indicated that the institution had good collaborations with emergency organizations and other higher educational institutions during crises, and that these relationships continue beyond the crises. Statements like “it was amazing” “there’s tremendous collaboration between the emergency services and the institution”, “the fires would be a great example of collaboration with the postsecondary institutions,” echoed across the responses by participants. However, one participant indicated that there was no collaboration between the

school and the university. In her words, “we didn’t reach out to the university for collaboration because we were just barely keeping afloat ourselves.” The school did not reach out to the university for support, even though they were close in proximity and evacuees housed on the campus had children going to this same school.

Despite the collaborations, there were still conflicts and challenges. A lot of the conflicts experienced were centered on the move in and move out of evacuees from the residences, the decision-making between the institution and the emergency services. Additionally, there were communication challenges, emergency agents were inexperienced, and there were no processes and procedures by the emergency agencies. According to Martha and Andy two of the participants,

What happened in the fires is that [the emergency agency] just don’t have that same experience and they don’t have the same procedures and so as you may have heard it became a bit of a nightmare, in terms of managing.

The province basically said state of emergency, we need more beds and before we knew it, it became a crisis as it was starting to interfere with other existing institutional programs and commitments we had on campus with people coming in and staying in our residences to attend conferences and events.

[We were] talking to the emergency services and the emergency operations center for [the city] and they can’t even talk to the police. The emergency operations center couldn’t understand what was going on, so a lot of it was around ... the external agencies.

These conflicts increased tensions and uncertainties in managing crisis. Collaborations during emergencies and disasters is not always smooth and free from frictions. However, with compromises, humility, broad-mindedness, openness to deep conversations and communication may lead to reciprocity and mutual accountability in shared decisions and outcomes (Rawlings, 2000; Schrage, 1990; Uhr, 2017). This corroborates with what was found in the institution

studied. Educational leaders in the institution interviewed addressed the conflicts and tensions by having meaningful and deep conversations around clarification of roles and responsibilities with the city and provincial emergency management agencies creating. In addition, the educational leaders through a collaborative decision-making process with the city and provincial emergency management agencies, created processes and procedures for the coordination of resources, created alternative housing for the evacuees off campus, and acted as a facilitator between the Red Cross, the city and the provincial emergency management agencies. Through compromises and communication, educational leaders learned to ask the right questions to gain the right information. Doing this led to mutual accountability for all involved in the crisis response process.

#### **Internal collaborations.**

Information gleaned from this study revealed that there were internal collaborations between the different units and faculties in the institution in coordinating operations and resources for crisis management. The university worked together as a whole not as isolated units as one participant pointed out “you cannot do emergency management in a corner.” Several faculties worked in partnerships to help manage the crisis, including the faculties of veterinary medicine, nursing, medicine, kinesiology and social work. For example, the faculty of veterinary medicine set up a clinic in the dining center to provide vaccinations and food for the pets that were brought into residence; kinesiology provided different programming for the children of the evacuees and translators were also sourced from the other faculties within the university. Uhr (2017) noted that during crisis response various resources do not only work as parallel organizations, but as a whole, leading to efficient direction and coordination.

No crisis response is without problems. Problems encountered were around decision-making, coordination, understanding what types of resources were required and prompt internal communication with all departments. My impressions from the responses indicate that despite these bumpy challenges and problems, the leaders got better at collaborating and built upon the lessons learned with each crisis. Martha revealed,

We engaged our faculty, veterinary medicine came in and looked after the animals, we had faculty of nursing involved, faculty of medicine who were doing room checks, we had social work involved, we had volunteer group that were helping out. We had Kinesiology involved running programs for the kids, we had our food provider in residence to do bagged lunches, you know because we had kids that were going off to school. It was everybody stepping up, but it was much smoother than the floods, like I said we got better.

### **The Interconnectedness of Crisis Communication and a University's Reputation**

A crisis affects systemic groups, and each stakeholder group controls hundreds of independent communication sources. Thus, crisis communication then becomes a systemic web of responsibilities that flows outward into the community and inward through the university departments (Moerschell & Novak, 2019). These university systemic groups or stakeholders not only include faculty, staff, administration, and students, but also their families, the wider community, and the media (Moerschell & Novak, 2019). Therefore, effective crisis communication is valuable to enhance preparedness and response, as well as raise the level of awareness of all stakeholders and their capacity to take appropriate measures (Wendling, Radisch & Jacobzone, 2013). John, one of the participants in my study reported that everything depends on communication especially in a crisis. My observations from the interviews suggest that crisis communications were a significant part of response effort of the institution. The educational institution endeavored to send quick communication to stakeholders. However, a

major concern expressed by leaders I interviewed was putting out the wrong type of information that could cause harm, especially in situations that involved the loss of life. One participant explained

We need to have more information, the cleaner the quicker, sometimes in this day and age of instantaneous knowledge the last thing you want to be accused of is putting out information that's wrong or could put people at harm.

It is important for leaders to be concerned about the care, and safety of all stakeholders and make sure that the right kind of official information is sent out. However, a delay in dissemination of the right information might lead to rumors and misinformation by stakeholders, which can then exacerbate the situation. The importance of timely distribution of the right and accurate knowledge cannot be underestimated. WebTeam (2016) suggested “crafting a message that is honest, clear, and concise” (para. 5) with no assumptions and ready for dissemination. Ulmer et al. (2011) suggested that organizations make a statement to stakeholders in order to reduce their anxiety, not speculating nor predicting but acknowledging and confirming the crisis. Furthermore, leaders could draft ready made template messages for quick communication.

Information gleaned from educational leaders revealed that various communication tools were employed through the office of University Relations to communicate real time and updated information to all stakeholders of the university. Among these communication tools were an emergency app, the university's webpage, emails, tv screens around the campus and Twitter. The type of communication tools is critical, where the timeliness of the information has impact on the direct safety and life of the population.

Researchers encourage the use of social media tools in crisis communications as these tools offer monitoring and communication solutions in real time to disseminate critical and

valuable information at a more rapid rate than traditional media (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger 2011; Wendling, Radisch & Jacobzone, 2013). In using these tools, Ulmer, et al. (2011) encouraged that communication with stakeholders be with “compassion, concern and empathy” (p.51). As one participant explained, the university focused on communicating care, concern and being genuine in the face of the city-wide crises. Care and compassion were seen especially when communicating with families of the victims of the murdered students and the evacuees from both the flood and the fire.

However, as one participant noted, “we had some challenges initially with communication even with our own teams.” He further explained,

[We] were talking to the emergency services and the emergency operations center for the [city] and they couldn't even talk to the police. The emergency operations center couldn't understand what was going on, so a lot of [communication challenges] was around that part with the external agencies.

Another participant discussed the importance of having the right communication and messages, and the right communications person in the room. Ulmer, et al. (2011) pointed out this same issue in their research explaining that organizations are often communicating with groups they are not familiar with and this lack of familiarity exist due to a lack of prior relationships with these stakeholders. They encouraged establishing strong positive relationships prior to crisis response (Ulmer, et al. 2011). Other ways communication could be improved would be communicating with others affected in the crisis in a timely manner, speeding up communications by creating template messages in advance and tweaking them when necessary.

Additional significant information gleaned in this study was how closely linked the university's reputation was to crisis response. Sims (2009) noted that reputation is formed by the



perceptions that people have about an organization based upon their prior experiences. In research conducted by Caleys, Cauberghe and Vyncke (2010) their findings suggested a relationship between crisis response strategy and organizational reputation, indicating that the more severe people perceive a crisis to be, the more negative the perceptions of the organization's reputation. Indeed, crises that are not well managed will hurt the reputation of a university (Coombs, 2007; Varma, 2009). All leaders interviewed had an awareness and concern about the university's reputation, because crisis posed a great reputational risk. According to Whitfield (2003) the university's reputation may be their most important asset.

Reputational risk has implications such as the perception of the university in the community and in the larger society. A negative perception could affect student enrollment, creating a downturn in student applications across the entire institution (Whitfield, 2003).

Despite this concern, doing the right thing in the crisis was of utmost importance to the leaders interviewed. Pauline explained,

I think if your focus is on what really matters, is on your values, then your whatever comes comes. Your reputation will be intact if you focus on your values, if you focus on your reputation that's the wrong approach, you have to focus on your values and doing the right thing.

Creating the right value systems of support, care, concern, and being humane before a crisis occurs can keep an institution focused not on its reputation but primarily on its people. A crisis can help a university gain reputation rather than lose it, depending on the type and timely crisis response. As Sheryl one of the participants explained

A crisis can actually be an opportunity to enhance your reputation and people don't know, a lot of people don't see that but it's not just about protecting your reputation, if you handle it well it could enhance your reputation.

Another participant, Esther indicated that the university gained a stronger reputation as a community leader in the way they handled the crisis. Esther explained further, “we were very good in the first 24 hours on all three crises which I think is really important thing to do”. Information gleaned from responses of higher education leaders suggest that gaining reputation was as a result of years of experience working together as a team and understanding the dynamics of what each leader brought to the table.

Furthermore, because reputation is shaped outside an organization, being able to measure and monitor that risk is critical (Ristuccia, 2019). Sheryl a participant in the study, indicated that she believed that after a crisis response, reputation measurement should be conducted by the university. She explained further “you are measuring both quantitatively and qualitatively.” Information gathered from the study revealed that the university regularly performs quantitative market research and a pulse check in the community in terms of reputation management. These types of quantitative and qualitative reputation checks ensure that the university is current on the community’s perceptions and can correct or respond in time to whatever damage that might have been done to its reputation.

### **The Importance of Training for Higher Education Crisis Leaders**

Organizations use different types of training to improve crisis leadership skills and develop resilience against crisis events (Muffet-Willett, 2013). These types of training provide opportunities for crisis leaders to be emerged in real world tasks and issues (Yukl, 2006). All of the educational leaders interviewed for this study considered the training they received for crisis management as adequate and effective. These trainings, according to the participants, enabled practice and learning, and gave them opportunities to make mistakes which otherwise may have

been costly in a real crisis. Participants explained that the benefits of training included opportunities to ask questions, to be open and not be afraid to make mistakes, build collaborative relationships and offered a way to get to know each other's capabilities. Furthermore, participants revealed that after experiencing a prior crisis, and when faced with a similar crisis, their sense of preparedness and confidence levels had increased. Training for crisis included formal and informal training sessions, and then reflecting on lived experience.

Formal training sessions included tabletop exercises, (these are exercises that allow for discussions of various simulated emergency situations), walking through a crisis checklists, seminars and workshops. Additionally, guest speakers from other higher educational institutions that had experienced crises as well as crisis management agencies were invited to talk about their crisis response experiences. One participant interviewed believed that having guest speakers speak about their experiences provided a more in-depth context. In her words, "I'll tell you, when you sit with people who'd been through real crises, you see their emotions come out and what it was for them, then you feel like you were there."

Guest speakers provided an experiential and first-hand learning opportunity that tabletops and checklists do not provide. Another participant explained that tabletops exercises were fact situations that created opportunities for learning, giving participants a sense of what questions to ask, how to be open, and the ability to build a real good team environment. As Boin, Kofman-Bos and Overdijk (2004) explained, a good simulation generates the necessary awareness that crisis can occur and the required motivation to assess and improve the crisis. Furthermore, when participants realized the nature and potential of threats, they may become keen to discuss and learn from others.

Informal training sessions included live stimulated crisis scenarios. Crisis simulations offer a near-perfect opportunity to get acquainted with all aspects of crisis management and the unique experience of “sitting in the hot seat”—an experience that can otherwise only be gained by managing a real-life crisis (Flin, 1996, p.231). This experience of “sitting in the hot seat” was described by one of the participants as “you feel like you are there [in the crisis], because adrenaline is different, emotions are different, and response is different.” These types of informal training sessions enable leaders to experience a “crisis” without the pressure of the real crisis.

Crisis training can assist in role clarification between all crisis leaders and responders, providing opportunities to debrief on expectations and effectiveness of response, as well as improve and fine-tune crisis plans and processes. Perry (2004) concurred that crisis exercise, and training sessions provide the context to test the effectiveness of both the training program and the plan, as well as the ability of personnel to execute the plan.

A key challenge about crisis training gathered from the interviews was crisis training fatigue. Crisis training fatigue could stem from having several response circles in crisis training and simulations, in addition to responding to a real crisis. Another challenge was time, participants reported that having busy schedules due to their leadership positions posed a major hindrance to creating time for training. One participant explained “we are always slightly challenged by finding time in our calendars...everybody is so busy right now and it is a very busy campus with lots going on.” Another participant explained that during crisis training simulations, the university focused on extreme cases such as an active shooter scenario. She explained that there was a need to also pay attention to less extreme cases of on campus violence, employee safety and sexual assault.

## **Self-care and Mental healthcare for Higher Education Leaders during and after Crisis Response**

Tan and Castillo (2014) described self-care as the engagement in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that maintain and promote physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. Furthermore, self-care addresses those elements of life that allow one to be well in a variety of ways such as spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally for renewal and personal growth (Charlescraft, Tartaglia, Dodd-McCue & Barker, 2010). Self-care attends to the whole being to create a stable and healthy person and is important for the well-being of the crisis leader. Tan (2011) referred to self-care as healthy and wise strategies for taking good care of oneself in order to manage stress. Crisis leaders face and manage emotionally intense, stressful, and high-tension crisis situations that may affect them adversely. Therefore, it is critical that crisis leaders practice self-care to better manage the high stress levels they may go through, rather than leading at the cost of long-term harm to themselves. Unfortunately, responses from educational leaders in the higher education studied revealed that these crisis leaders were not always as skilled or attentive to taking care of themselves or getting support for their mental health as they were at taking care of others. A participant explained “I didn’t get any [mental health support], I didn’t ask for any [mental health support]. I think we were more in the caring mode, looking after our staff... I was more anxious and concerned about others than myself.” She further explained “I’ve spent a lot of time worrying about the people underneath me but really in all the circumstances, I haven’t thought a lot about myself.” Another participant concurred saying “the funny thing is the worst people to look after themselves are the frontline...I did not go for anything [support] outside of my team.” This same reply was echoed across 80% of the leaders I interviewed.

In a study conducted by Fein and Isaacson (2009), they found that leaders reported becoming so focused on crisis-related tasks, they often did not attend to their most basic needs. These leaders were so focused on creating a sense of safety and security for others that they paid high personal costs. In my study, many leaders responded that upon reflection they should have engaged some level of support and self-care for themselves such as seeking professional help.

For leaders who took care of themselves, information gleaned indicated that they had developed different coping strategies such as having social supports, trust and care within safe spaces outside the institution, faith-based support and physical activities. These leaders emphasized the importance of having social support networks. In the literature, social support is seen as a protective factor, and could be a primary factor within the individual's personal and organizational network, and also when the social support is from superiors (Leffler & Dembert, 1998; Regehr, Hill & Glancy, 2000).

Other ways the educational leaders in this study took care of themselves during and after crises included talking through their thoughts and feelings with others, engaging in some form of physical activity such as running or walking, listening to music and reading inspirational quotes. Additionally, leaders encouraged their team members to use the resources available to them. One leader commented "it's about employee care and attention." Leaders emphasized the importance of having their superiors encourage them to take a break and use the services available as an effective strategy for employee self-care.

Something to note was that although the university provided several services for staff wellness, such as counselors, and a psychologist, senior leaders did not see the need to take advantage of these services offered but preferred to create their own support groups outside of

the university. One possible explanation could be because senior leaders did not want to be perceived as weak but preferred to be perceived as strong leaders who could manage crises and look after others. The perception of weakness by leaders could be because “the culture of leadership in schools promotes service to others and stoicism in a crisis” (Fein, 2001, p. 238).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed seven interrelated themes that emerged from the findings. These themes were: (a) that a crisis team’s composition, roles, and responsibilities had an impact on crisis response. Leadership teams comprised of a crisis management team, an emergency operations group and first responders. Each team performed specific duties and responsibilities; (b) that developing the required crisis leadership competencies was important for a successful crisis response. Responses revealed that leaders recognized the required competencies necessary to respond to crises and were actively portraying those competencies; (c) what the university’s role in responding to the flood, wildfire and students’ murders was. The university leaders were not initially prepared to handle and host the first set of evacuees from the flood, however, the university got better at hosting evacuees and asking the right kind of questions from their partners; (d) the importance of collaborations/partnerships during crisis response. Responses indicated that it was important to form and cultivate both internal and external collaborations and partnerships before a crisis happens; (e) the interconnectedness of crisis communication and a university’s reputation; (f) that constant training exercises can be beneficial but can also cause training fatigue; and (g) that leaders tended to overlook their self-care and mental health both during and after a crisis.

Overall educational leaders interviewed believed that all crisis responses were handled effectively despite the challenges that occurred. They chose to focus on seeing these challenges as learnings and moments of opportunities to improve on the processes of crisis management.



## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore higher education senior leaders' response to crises. Eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior leaders in a higher education institution, a leader in an emergency management agency and a vice principal of an elementary school. Seven interrelated themes emerged for the discussion which were: (a) that a crisis team's composition, roles, and responsibilities had an impact on crisis response; (b) that developing the required crisis leadership competencies was important for a successful crisis response; (c) the university's role in responding to the flood, wildfire and students' murders; (d) the importance of collaborations/partnerships during crisis response; (e) the interconnectedness of crisis communication and a university's reputation; (f) that constant training exercises can be beneficial but can also cause training fatigue; and (g) that leaders tended to overlook their self-care and mental health both during and after a crisis.

This final chapter discusses the implications of the study, recommendations for further research and the conclusion of the study.

### **Implications of the Study**

Managing crisis response is a delicate and sensitive issue as there are many unanticipated and unexpected circumstances. In a higher education institution, crisis response becomes more challenging and complicated because of many structural and environmental challenges. Spellings, Price, and Modzeleski (2009) noted that the structural and environmental characteristics pose challenges for access control, monitoring movements, defining boundaries for facilities and grounds, standardizing procedures, decision-making processes, and prioritizing resource allocations. Responses from higher education crisis leaders revealed the success and

value of creating crisis response teams by the university. These teams were made up of highly skilled experts with different portfolios and performed interdependent and highly consequential tasks in dealing with these structural and environmental challenges. Each portfolio addressed a structural or environmental challenge. However, as seen in the analysis presented in chapter five, there were setbacks to this structure such as the collaborative nature of teams leading to slow decision making, lack of prompt communications, leadership continuity if a team member is absent or sick, and the ability to timely capture and update crisis management processes in an emergency response manual. In addressing the issue of leadership continuity, Wade (2004) encouraged creating a rotation of multiple teams as backup to ensure leadership continuity during crisis response. In addition, leaders could endeavor to create an atmosphere of openness to encourage deep and meaningful conversations across all teams on emergence work and academic continuity of learning.

Furthermore, Gallagher (2002) suggested that crisis management plans should be considered as living documents and continually updated. Therefore, it is important to create real time schedules to update and review emergence response manuals. The review or update of the emergency response manual could be done individually by members of the crisis management team or as a group to ensure that all updates are captured. These real time schedules could be annually or twice a year depending on how often crisis response occurs. An updated emergency response manual could be a useful tool in onboarding new crisis leaders. Furthermore, because of the peculiarity of crises and responses in higher education institutions, individuals who are experts in their field, who may not be members of the crisis management team or emergency

operations group, can be included in the crisis management team when the need arises to add value and contribute their expertise to the response process.

Every educational leader interviewed believed that all three crises the university experienced were handled well. However, the flood, which was the first major crisis, highlighted the deficiencies the university had and its lack of preparedness for the magnitude of this crisis. The challenges faced included the university's unpreparedness to host evacuees, closing the university, lack of crisis management continuity plans for each department, issues with internal communications, and collaborations with external emergency agencies. Despite these challenges, educational leaders who were interviewed chose to have an attitude of turning the challenges faced into moments of learnings and opportunities to make strategic changes. This attitude revealed a humbleness, a willingness to learn and the forward-facing posture of the institution. The higher education institution studied tackled some of its challenges by creating continuity plans for each department and developing better processes for crisis response. In addition, they became better at asking the right type of questions from emergency agencies as to what kinds of supports were required from them. It was clear that lessons learned from the flood crises informed the responses of this institution to the crises of wildfire and tragic murders.

Furthermore, higher education institutions can develop and build intentional collaborative relationships with external emergency services, other higher education institutions and schools to allow for mutual sharing of resources and so augment each other during emergency operations. No institution can operate alone in crisis response. Creating these internal and external collaborative relationships can provide the support needed to save many lives in a devastating and unpredictable crisis. McEntire and Dawson (2007) encouraged crisis leaders to become well-

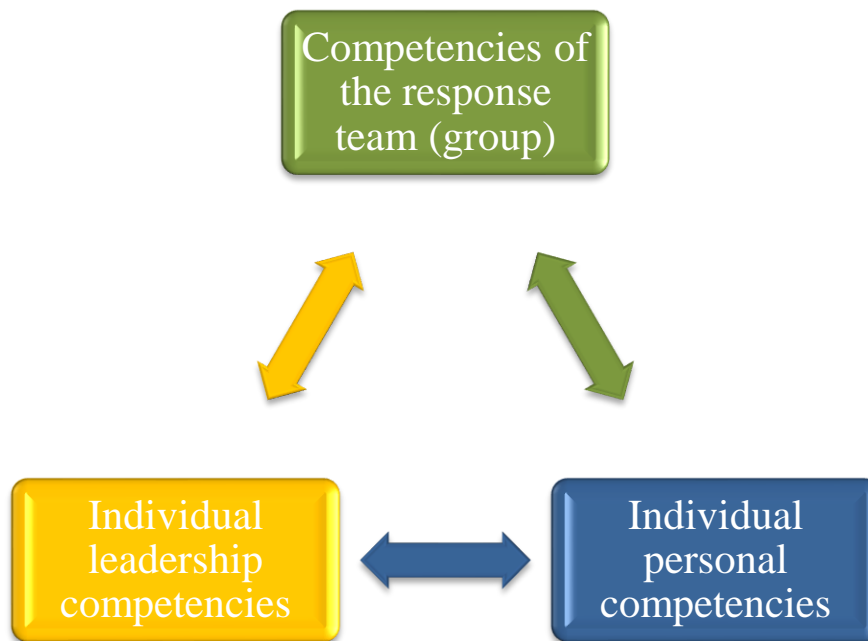
acquainted with all departments and agencies that will have a role in crisis management.

Identifying these departments and agencies can lead to strong collaborative relationships, which could be formed prior to crisis situations in an atmosphere of openness and trust leading to rich generative discussions. Muffet-Willett (2010) and Schrage (1990) noted that with each rich generative discussion, solutions can be shared, decisions and actions can be taken in an atmosphere of trust, collaboration, coordination and cooperation fostered for mutual benefit.

### **Towards a Higher Education Crisis Leadership Competency Model**

I systematically recorded responses about crisis leadership competencies as they emerged from the narratives of educational leaders. I organized these competencies into three categories: (a) competencies of the response team (group) (b) individual leadership competencies (c) individual personal competencies and created a crisis leadership competency model. I propose that the crisis leadership competency model may be used by universities and colleges during crisis training sessions such as tabletops and simulations. In addition, educational crisis leaders may be trained on how to develop these competencies, in group activities, tabletop exercises and training simulations or as individuals looking for ways to improve on their leadership competencies.

The crisis leadership competency model is important because the competencies are people focused on building trust to move an institution forward through crisis response. The crisis leadership competency model is further explained and examined below. See figure 4.



**Figure 4. Higher education crisis leadership competency model**

The model is divided into three categories of competencies (a) competencies of the response team (group) (b) individual leadership competencies (c) individual personal competencies. The arrows depict that the competencies are interconnected and interrelated.

***Competencies of the response team (group).***

Because a crisis response team consists of a diverse group of people with different backgrounds, abilities, and knowledge levels, it is therefore, important that the team possesses technical know-how, prior experience in crisis response, the ability to put together a competent team, the ability to logistical handle the resolution of a crisis. The team must possess deep knowledge of institutional processes, be able and ready to practice, receive training and be prepared to handle any crisis. The competencies of the response team may be developed through workplace crisis planning and preparation, in addition to informal and formal training sessions.

These competencies are essential for termination and learning in responding to crisis as discussed in chapter two. A team creates critical work processes and reflects leadership for its own development and performance (Lumsden & Lumsden, 2000) thus, it is important that the team possess technical know-how and deep knowledge of institutional processes and an understanding of why they need these competencies. Members of crisis response teams should not be novices but should have had some prior crisis management experiences. These experiences may lead to higher levels of confidence and deeper understandings of crisis management processes that enables team effectiveness during crisis response.

Additionally, at some point in a crisis, crisis response team members may be required to build a team for handling logistics and crisis resolution, it is imperative that members of the team understand that building the right team requires time and constant communication; as teams go through different stages of team building such as forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning (Quality Solutions, 2011). As crisis response teams develop the competencies required, the team can then create a self-identity or self-image that becomes a cohesive and motivating force for its members (Lumsden & Lumsden, 2000) leading to an effective and successful crisis response.

***Individual leadership competencies.***

These are the individual abilities or qualities that a crisis leader should possess. These individual leadership competencies can be fostered through practice. The crisis leadership competencies focus on sense-making, and decision-making during crisis as discussed in chapter two (Boin, t' Hart, Stern, & Sundelius, 2005). A crisis leader in higher education should be flexible, should be decisive, should be an effective communicator, should be open to new

possibilities and ideas, should be a good relationship builder, should be able to process information quickly and accurately and should be able to direct people who need support to the right service and right place.

Crises cause many thousands or even millions of people real concern and may cause widespread panic that can equal the disruption of the event itself (Van Wart & Kapucu, 2011). Therefore, a crisis leader in higher education needs to know who needs what information and recognize the best manner to distribute this information (DeChurch, Burke, Shuffler, Lyons, Doty, & Salas, 2011). It is imperative that the crisis leader learn to process information quickly and be analytic because limited information is available at the early stages of a crisis. Once information is processed quickly, then critical decisions must be made and be implemented decisively and immediately.

Other qualities identified were the abilities to be open to new possibilities and ideas in addition to being flexible to changing situations because as the crisis unfolds, directives may be changed, plans evolve, and leaders can embrace disequilibrium. In addition, a crisis leader needs to be an effective communicator to communicate decisions in a clear and honest manner. Van Wart and Kapucu (2011) noted that crisis leaders must be dynamic in articulating the means by which people and property will be protected to the utmost and doing so takes consummate communication skills. A crisis leader must learn to build good relationships both within the crisis team and with others during crisis response. Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) observed that organizations with leaders who create a network of relationships increase their ability to be sensitive to operations, resilient, and to see the big picture. Furthermore, the ability to build relationships is necessary for creating effective collaborations and partnerships. Goswick,

Macgregor, Hurst, Wall and White (2018) explained that collaborations built within the community prior to a crisis can provide the necessary support and connections needed during a crisis response. Additionally, strong relations before and during a crisis between organizational leaders and local emergency management teams can pay major dividends in the response and recovery operations (Cavanaugh, 2006).

***Individual personal competencies.***

An organizational crisis is an emotional event, making it essential that the leader deal with his or her emotions as well as those affected by crises (Dubrin, 2013). In dealing with other's emotions a crisis leader's individual personal competencies are crucial as people begin to "make meaning of the crisis" (Boin, t' Hart, Stern, & Sundelius, 2005, p. 10-15) as discussed in chapter two. These competencies are internal and outward facing towards other people. These personal individual crisis leadership competencies include the ability to approach a crisis in a calm manner, and a possession of self-control by the crisis leader. According to Van Wart and Kapucu (2011) exhibiting calmness in the face of adversity is a necessity no matter how inwardly challenged a leader might feel. The crisis leader is often dealing with people who are upset, distraught and might be experiencing some sense of helplessness, remaining calm and exhibiting self-control can contribute to the effective management of crisis, provide reassurance and confidence that can help others to cope.

In addition, the crisis leader should be capable of listening carefully to what others are saying. A crisis leader should listen carefully in order to make unilateral and compassionate decisions in the event of a crisis, where human lives may have been lost or property destroyed. A crisis leader who listens carefully will not make assumptions but will seek to understand what



the priorities are for evacuees or victims in a crisis. Additionally, a crisis leader needs to possess empathy for others. An empathetic crisis leader can understand the impact that a crisis has on people. The empathetic leader can connect with other's feelings, become aware and understand the pain and suffering of others. This awareness and understanding may motivate the crisis leader to action showing compassion to victims involved in a crisis.

Another individual personal competency of a crisis leader is the ability to be humble. This is the ability to understand that in a crisis, a leader may not have all the answers and will need the help and expertise of others. Glanz (2003) defined humility as the awareness of one's limitations while at the same time, cognizant of one's abilities. He observed that leaders were invested with authority within the educational hierarchy; these leaders have high salaries, a separate union, their own offices, and even private parking spaces. He emphasized that educational leaders are confident and secure enough in their own accomplishments and therefore need to learn how to negotiate the delicate balance between expertise and humility (Glanz, 2003). A humble crisis leader understands and recognizes that they are not in control of everything. They realize that when working with faculty, staff and students who have been affected by crises, it is of utmost importance to treat people with respect, be humane and show humility.

Additionally, a crisis leader should be trustworthy and give the impression of being trustworthy, as well as be thoughtful and compassionate. These competencies come in to play when communication is issued to everyone involved in a crisis. A crisis leader who is trustworthy creates an atmosphere of respect and show that they can be depended upon in a

crisis. A thoughtful and compassionate crisis leader can provide stakeholders various opportunities to create meaning out of a catastrophic situation (Goswick et al., 2018).

The crisis leadership competency model could be useful for crisis leaders in higher education for understanding the types of competencies required for crises response and management. Because this model was generated from educational crisis leaders' perspectives, the model is authentic and is an indicator of how valuable these competencies are in higher education settings. These competencies could become part of a training model and included in training sessions for higher education crisis leaders. It is good to note that a combination of several competencies in the crisis leadership competency model can be applied at any phase of crisis management and these competencies can be enhanced through consistent practice and use. Another thing to note according to Devitt and Borodzicz (2008) is that the ability to display all competencies by crisis leaders could be influenced by their personal, individual backgrounds, their self-beliefs and experience in crisis management.

Crisis leadership is a process. It is the ability to demonstrate the core set of competencies identified here in a complex and dynamic environment, and to do so under a spotlight. The consequences of not building and using the repertoire of crisis leadership competencies can be significant, both personally for the leader and for the higher education institution (James & Wooten, 2015).

### **Implications for Self-care and Mental Health for Higher Education Crisis Leaders**

Most of the educational leaders interviewed focused on caring for others in their teams and the victims of the crises, to the detriment of their own self-care and mental health care. Responses from educational leaders revealed that leaders experienced emotional triggers caused

by "environmental cues or by speaking about their experiences" (Fein, 2001, p. 234). Without proper self-care and mental health care, crisis leaders could be susceptible to emotional triggers that could activate depression, fear, mental health concerns and sadness. It may not be enough to tell leaders to take care of themselves, since they may not do so, therefore, higher educational institutions could create an atmosphere or culture to acknowledge that it is okay to seek help. This atmosphere or culture could be created and communicated during critical incidents debriefs, one-on-one conversations, mental readiness programs and pre-routines of support to crisis leaders (Fein, 2001).

Additionally, higher education institutions could establish policies that draw boundaries around what is asked and expected of individual leaders during crises. These policies could also include provision of special resources (financial and other) for leader support, a mandatory leave of absence after crisis leadership, and working with a crisis mentor in the immediate days after a disaster (Fein, 2001; Fein & Isaacson, 2009).

Educational leaders could be encouraged to understand that they do not always need to be stoic in crises, they could be made aware that there might be some residual or posttraumatic impact after a crisis response. Therefore, they could seek help and support through confidential resources, counselling, social and psychological support. This help and support could assist leaders to identify any underlying emotional trauma experienced during crisis response. Also, educational leaders can show empathy and be compassionate to themselves, create personal boundaries as well as personal debrief confidential sessions with trusted colleagues and friends (Providence Healthcare, 2015) before, during and after a crisis.

Lastly, one thing to note is that the type of help and support required by educational leaders might be different for each crisis leader. Something to take into consideration when help and support is sought would be the individual crisis leader's needs, past crisis experiences and past traumas. Establishing personalized self-care and mental health care could prepare educational crisis leaders to deal with the next crisis they will most likely face.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The sample for the current study were eleven senior leaders in a western higher education institution, an emergency management agency and a vice principal of an elementary school. For further research, a multi-case study can be conducted to include two or more higher education institutions to expand the scope of the study. In addition, further research could possibly consist of participants from the emergency operations group and first responders to gain their perspectives on crisis response.

Further qualitative research could be conducted on types of self-care and mental health care of crisis leaders in several higher education institutions and other types of schools. This research could determine if self-care and mental health care had any impact on these crisis leaders.

Other types of crises in higher education such as ransomware and students' suicides were factors that emerged in the research but were not the focus of this study, the impact of these types of crises in higher education institutions could be further investigated.

### **Conclusion**

It was important to listen to the narratives of senior leaders in higher education institution to understand their stories and examine how they responded to crises. Substantial information has been gleaned from this study on responses to three different types of crises. A qualitative

research was employed to ask the “what” or “how” questions (Creswell, 1994). A narrative inquiry methodology was conducted to engage people in active, meaning-making dialogues, that allowed for thick or rich descriptions resulting in accounts that focused on the personal meaning for the participants (Denzin et al., 2011; Fraser, 2004). Chapter six included implications for higher education leaders, the higher education crisis leadership competencies model, recommendations for further research and conclusion of the study.

Unfortunately, crisis researchers predict that leaders will be faced with an increasing number of different types of crises in the future (Mitroff, 2004; Mitroff & Anagnos, 2001). The quality of crisis leadership in a higher education institution can have a lasting impact on the institution’s community, and reputation. This study has provided a learning tool for current and future higher education leaders. The findings, insights, and experiences from this study may be useful in advancing the knowledge base in the field of crisis leadership in higher education and leadership response to human-made and natural disasters.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Protocol**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

**TITLE OF RESEARCH:** A Western Canadian University Leadership Response to Human-made and Natural Crises. Strategies and Challenges

**INVESTIGATOR:** Glory Ovie, Werklund School of Education

I am sincerely grateful for your willingness to share and express your thoughts. I will be asking you several questions and recording your responses verbatim. After the transcription of your thoughts and feelings, I will ask for your review of what I transcribed. It is important for the transcription to be verbatim so that I do not paraphrase something you said with an incorrect interpretation. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today.

### **The Interview Questions**

#### **Demographics**

1. What is your formal leadership role, and can you describe what it entails?
2. Tell me about your role in the crisis management team.
3. Can you tell me about any experiences in handling any type of crises prior to the flood/wildfire/student murders?
4. Can you describe the competencies of what you believe to be an effective crises leader?  
Can you tell me how you did or did not demonstrate these leadership competencies during a crisis?

#### **The flood 2013**

5. When you first heard about the flood, what was your initial reaction?

6. When did you know you were to take in evacuees from the flood? What were your thoughts, your initial response, and your feelings?
7. Does the university have emergency procedures in place for handling crises? If so, tell me about these procedures, what procedures did you find to be inadequate and what procedures were subsequently put in place for future possibilities?
8. Can you tell me about the collaboration between the university and the elementary school in settling evacuees' children in the school?
9. Can you tell me about the collaboration between the university and the city in settling evacuees?
10. Do you think that these crises were effectively handled? Why? What would you have done differently?

#### **The wildfire**

11. When you first heard about the wildfire, what was your initial reaction?
12. When did you know you were to take in evacuees from the fire? What were your thoughts, your initial response, and your feelings?
13. Do you think that these crises were effectively handled? Why? What would you have done differently?

#### **The murders of several students**

14. When you first heard about the murders what was your initial reaction?
15. Tell me about your experiences as you handled this crisis.
16. How did the university handle this crisis?

17. Tell me about the communication tools (social media, newspapers and tv stations) employed during the crisis. In your opinion, how efficient do you think these tools were?
18. What lessons did you learn? What might you do differently and why?

**Training/Preparation**

19. Describe your preparation and training for addressing crisis. Do you think these preparation and training were adequate? If not, Why?
20. Tell me about your experiences in handling these crises? Did you feel well-prepared, inadequate? Ready?
21. What types of selfcare and mental health care support did you receive after handling these crises? If none, would you have liked some support for selfcare and mental health care? What would it look like? What type of support for selfcare and mental healthcare would you have preferred?

## **Appendix B: Recruitment Letter for University Leaders**

### **Recruitment Letter for University Leaders - Invitation for Interview**

**The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study**

Date:

Participant Name:

Address:

Dear Mr. Ms. Dr. Professor \_\_\_\_\_

This letter is a request to participate in a dissertation research study being conducted in partial fulfillment of my doctoral degree requirement at the University of Calgary titled “A Western Canadian University Leadership Response to Human-made and Natural Crises. Strategies and Challenges.” The purpose of this study is to collect firsthand accounts of these crises from educational leaders in the University. The university was involved in temporarily housing and accommodating evacuees from the flood 2013, and the wildfire 2016. I would like to know, for example, if you were in partnership with the elementary school and in what ways you acted as a facilitator or intermediary to the settling of these families, both the adults and the children in the circumstance? I am also interested in the university leadership response to the murders of some students. I would like to know your experiences with respect to this crisis. I will be glad to receive any information on other crises situations you may have responded to. The information you give may help future educational leaders and responders. The researcher in this project is Glory Ovie, PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Education, University of Calgary.

As such, you are invited to take part in one interview and follow-up. These sessions are voluntary should you wish and will be at a convenient location to you. With your permission the interview will be audiotaped to provide a complete transcription and you will then be asked to review for accuracy. You are free to decline to answer any question. Once a transcription of

data collected has been created, you will be asked to read over your contributions to ensure accuracy and change any information you wish to have altered.

Participating in research is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. Your name and work place will not be disclosed in the dissertation unless you explicitly wish to. Every attempt will be made to provide confidentiality of the information you provide. The data gathered will be used for research purposes only.

I hope you will agree to participate in this research about educational leadership response to unpredictable human-made and natural crises. **Please sign and complete the attached Research Consent Form if you agree to participate in this research.** I would like to stress that you do not need to participate, and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I can be reached by phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx or my doctoral supervisor Dr. XXXXX who can be reached at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Thank you for participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Glory Ovie

PhD Candidate

University of Calgary



## **Appendix C: Recruitment Letter for Principals/Assistant Principals**

### **Recruitment Letter for Principals/Assistant Principals - Invitation for Interview**

**The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study**

Date:

Participant Name:

School Address:

Dear Mr. Ms. Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

This letter is a request to participate in a dissertation research study being conducted in partial fulfillment of my doctoral degree requirement at the University of Calgary titled “A Western Canadian University Leadership Response to Human-made and Natural Crises. Strategies and Challenges.” The purpose of this study is to collect firsthand accounts from educational leaders (principals, and assistant principals) related to the flood 2013 and the wildfire 2016. Since your school was involved in accepting students that were evacuated and temporarily housed in the university from both crisis situations, you have information that may help future educational leaders. The researcher in this project is Glory Ovie, PhD Candidate in the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary.

As such, you are invited to take part in a one-hour semi-structured interview. All semi-structured interviews are voluntary at a convenient location to you. With your permission the interview will be audiotaped to provide a complete transcription and you will then be asked to review for accuracy. You are free to decline to answer any question. Once a transcription of data collected has been created, you will be asked to read over your contributions to ensure accuracy and change any information you wish to have altered.

Participating in the research is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. Your name and school will not be disclosed in the dissertation. Every attempt will be

made to provide confidentiality of the information you provide. The data gathered will be used for research purposes only.

I hope you will agree to participate in this research about educational leadership response to unpredictable human-made and natural crises. **Please sign and complete the attached Research Consent Form if you agree to participate in this research.** I would like to stress that you do not need to participate, and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I can be reached by phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx or my doctoral supervisor Dr. XXXXX who can be reached at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Thank you for participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Glory Ovie

PhD Candidate

University of Calgary

## Appendix D: Participant Consent Form



### Participant Consent Form

#### Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

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Researcher: Glory Ovie, Graduate Programs, Werklund School of Education,  
(xxx) xxx-xxxx

Academic Supervisor: Dr. XXXXX, Werklund School of Education  
(xxx) xxx-xxxx

#### Title of Project:

A Western Canadian University Leadership Response to Human-made and Natural Crises.  
Strategies and Challenges

#### Sponsor:

None

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This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is part of the process of informed consent. It provides a general idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Participation is completely voluntary, confidential.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study is to explore the issues related to how higher education leaders respond to human-made and natural crises. I intend to collect firsthand accounts and gather key information from the university administrators, the crisis management team and the university external partners who were directly involved in responding to the flood 2013; the murders of 2014 and wildfire 2016. The goal is to help current and future educational leaders better understand situations that they can prepare for but never truly anticipate.

**What will I be asked to do?**

Your participation in this study if you decide to accept will be in the form of one interview and follow-up. You will be asked as well to allow the researcher review and quote in the study your professional profile. The interview will be about an hour long at a time and at a convenient location to you.

Examples of the interview questions are:

1. What is your formal leadership role, and can you describe what it entails?
2. Tell me about your role in the crisis management team.
3. Can you tell me about any experiences in handling any type of crises prior to the flood/fire/student murders?
4. Can you describe the competencies of what you believe to be an effective crises leader? Can you tell me how you did or did not demonstrate these leadership competencies during a crisis?

The interview will be audiotaped to provide a complete transcription of the interview that you will then be asked to review for accuracy. You are free to decline to answer any question. Once a transcription of data collected has been created, you will be asked to read over your contributions to ensure they are accurate and change any information you wish to have altered.

Once data analysis is complete, you will be asked to provide feedback on the study conclusions. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study any time, you can do so without penalty. The results of the research will be published but your name will not be used, and your results will be maintained in confidence unless otherwise indicated by you. The study presents no risk to you as a participant. If you have any concerns, you may contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx, or my supervisor, Dr. XXXXX at xxx-xxx-xxxx

**What type of personal information will be collected?**

No personal identifying information will be collected in this study. Should you agree to participate you will be asked to provide your gender, and leadership role, your leadership style, and your level of involvement in the crisis management team, just to mention some of the conversations. There are several options for you to consider, if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some, or none of them. Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) that grants me your permission to:

I grant permission to be audio-taped: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

You may refer to me by a pseudonym: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

The pseudonym I choose for myself is \_\_\_\_\_

You may quote me and use my pseudonym Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

You may quote me and use my name

Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

You may use quotes from the primary data given to you by myself  
in the data reporting:

Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

**Are there risks or benefits if I participate?**

The study presents no risks to you as a participant. The benefits of participating will be to help current and future educational leaders better understand situations that they can prepare for and contribute to increased discussion on the establishment of research on higher education leadership to crises.

**Confidentiality**

Information obtained about you for this study will be kept private to the extent allowed by law. Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. If you decide to discontinue your participation, then your data will be extracted and deleted from the researcher’s records and will not be included in the findings of the study. If you wish to withdraw from the study at any point, please email or call the researcher to give notice of your decision. You can opt to redraw from the study up until midnight, December 13, 2018.

No one except the researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the interview tape. Only anonymous quotes will be used for any presentation or publication of results. Pseudonyms will identify interview data. The anonymous data will be stored for five years on a password protected computer, at which time they will be permanently erased. Audiotapes will also be destroyed at the same time. Finally, the collected data will be used to inform a doctoral degree project.

**What happens to the information I provide?**

This interview will be recorded and transcribed. Interview participants will be given the opportunity to review a copy of the transcript of their interview before its inclusion in the study. You will receive this transcript through a digital file and will be given a timeframe of two weeks from the date of receipt of the transcript to provide feedback or suggestions for change.

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***Signatures (written consent)***

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators or involved institution from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research

project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (Please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions/Concerns**

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and /or your participation, please contact:

Researcher: Glory Ovie, Doctoral Candidate  
Graduate Programs in Education/Werklund School of Education  
xxx-xxx-xxxxx

Supervisor: Dr. XXXXX  
Graduate Programs in Education/Werklund School of Education  
xxx-xxx-xxxx

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services office, University of Calgary at xxx-xxx-xxxx and xxx-xxx-xxxx

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The researcher has kept a copy of the consent form.