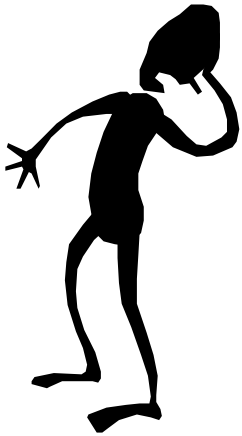


Metanarration's role in restructuring perceptions of crisis



- Humans describe their existence and make sense of the world by telling stories.
- Organizations can turn to story telling in times of crisis to understand and explain the nature of the problem, and to respond to it.
- Interpretations of reality can be contested.



Failure and Crisis

- Failure and crisis are not the same.
 - Failure is a precondition, necessary but insufficient for crisis.
 - Extended failure, or malaise, is also not crisis.
 - Crisis is a “moment of decisive intervention.”
 - Crisis necessitates change. The old system can no longer be maintained.
 - Crisis often is a contested construct.

The Metanarration of crisis model

Failure ↑ Media reports (newsworthy event)
↑ Primary narration ↑ Abstraction and
Secondary narration ↑ Reconstruction of the
crisis ↑ Responses

- Failures are **resampled** and **reordered** to create the secondary narration.
- The metanarration must be **abstract** enough to allow for the **explanation** of newly discovered failures, and must be capable of **shifting attention/blame**.



Model continued...

- The organization must provide a simplified account that is **sufficiently flexible** to narrate symptoms while **attributing causality and responsibility**.
- If successful, this alternate construction of crisis is mediated, and the abstractions are confirmed when each new symptom is assimilated into the **metanarrative**. The crisis becomes lived in those terms.
- The **organization responds** to the new, more favorable, construction of the crisis.

The Case of NHTSA

- Ford and Firestone have received a lot of attention (blame) during the tire crisis, but what about NHTSA?
- The tire tragedies did not become a crisis for NHTSA until Congress called them into hearings.
- Organizations attempt to make sense of crisis by reinterpreting the primary narrative. This process is metanarration.





NHTSA

- Failure - Tires failed, and the public was not informed. People are dying.
- Media reports - Houston (KHOU)
- Primary narrative - Firestone Wilderness AT tires are failing on Ford Explorers causing roll-overs. People have died. NHTSA did nothing.



NHTSA

- Metanarration (Resampling and abstraction)
 - Why?
 - “Firestone is to blame” or “Ford is to blame”
 - Ignores direct experiences
 - » The blow-outs are happening on Ford vehicles with Firestone tires.
 - Ignores mediated experiences
 - » The government agency responsible for preventing this crisis did nothing.



NHTSA

■ Reconstruction

- NHTSA followed the rules, but the rules were ineffective.
 - Tires were never tested at the recommended inflation level
 - Repair rate and defect data are no longer collected from garages and insurance companies
- NHTSA was handcuffed by its own bad rules. The rules must be changed.



NHTSA

■ Response

- The rules are under review, and changes will be submitted.
- “We failed, and we will change to prevent future failures” leaves little room for attack.



NHTSA

■ Effect

- Congress shifted from accusation to anticipating future correction.
- No punitive actions, such as budget cuts.
- Congress actually discussed budget increases and enhanced regulatory testimony.
- Success!