

Appalachian Business Decline and Closure: An Examination of Corporate Communication
Practices in the New River Valley

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Abstract

Organizational changes occur in many forms and affect employees and employers in various ways. Of these changes, downsizings and closures are common because they are viewed as cost effective ways to reappropriate funds to other areas of need. For many organizations, layoffs are deemed necessary in order to remain in business and competitive in the workforce (Kim, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to explore the channels of communication used by corporations in the New River Valley during layoffs that occurred as a result of downsizing or corporate closure. Fourteen participants, one manager who delivered layoff notices, and 13 employees who were laid off took part in semi-structured interviews. Participants in the study were current and/or former construction workers, physician assistants, truck assembly plant workers, sewing machine operators, manufacturing plant workers, administrative assistants, chefs, explosive plant workers, and IT support. In addition to the interviews, examination of the organizations' corporate social responsibility stances and statements of value were coded and analyzed using content analysis. The results revealed that overall layoff victims were disappointed in the lack of communication surrounding the layoff process and many were left totally in the dark.

Ineffective communication habits from employers have long been linked to work environments and have caused increased absenteeism, disloyalty, and disaffection. For a number of participants in the study, the poor and inconsistent communication habits at their jobs only worsened during the restructuring process. For many, the transitional period, combined with the lack of communication within the company, evoked feelings of confusion, insecurity, and anger.

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Although Kline (2006) found that most layoff victims prefer clear, direct communication, this study revealed that many organizations in the New River Valley from which participants were laid off did not communicate clearly, if they communicated at all during the layoff process. Failure to communicate during such crucial times cultivated an issue for the employees. An issue is characterized as a gap between corporate actions and stakeholder expectations (Berg & Feldner, 2017). Victims of layoffs in the NRV took issue with their employers' failure to communicate the unfavorable direction of the companies and, ultimately, their individual employment status.

Since layoffs and unemployment have sadly become characteristic of the New River Valley, it was surprising that little research existed on the communication tactics used by local businesses. This study sought to gain a better understanding of the layoff communication practices from the perspective of employees and employers. The data from the interviewees' experiences and the literature on humane downsizing were used to compile best practice suggestions for future use, in the case that organizations in the New River Valley are faced with laying off employees.

Still to this day, layoff remains one of the most common methods of downsizing used by organizations (Walker, 2015). While employees can accept the highs and lows of the economy, what they cannot accept is the uncertainty that accompanies a workplace plagued with layoff rumors. Employees want their organizations to demonstrate humane, sensible, and responsible approaches to layoffs.

The study can contribute to positive social change by identifying methods for organizational leaders to manage impacts of layoffs and implement effective communication

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strategies that may lead to reduced confusion, anger, and pain for laid off employees and a more productive work environment for surviving employees and managers.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As a transplant to the New River Valley (NRV) from the deep south, I found many things about the area to be fascinating – the mountains, the culture, and the warm hearts of the people, to name a few. The NRV, nestled in the Blue Ridge and Appalachian Mountains of southwest Virginia, is comprised of the counties of Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, Pulaski, and the City of Radford. Altogether, the regional population totaled 178,350 at the time of the 2010 census (New River Valley CEDS, 2017). The region is filled with the perfect blend of mountains, arts, and education. Even in the most rural areas of Sweet Home Alabama and Peachy Georgia, the colloquialisms, the cuisine, even the conversations between neighbors, were all vastly different from those in southwest Virginia. It was a combination of all of those things that led me to another interest I developed while living here – the exploration of what has happened in southwest Virginia with all the corporate closures and downsizing, and how that has affected the people involved.

The concerns for the future of the New River Valley, in relation to downsizing, have been present for quite some time. Virginia's New River Valley Vision 2020, a community-driven board of strategists and leaders, published a report in 1995, which stated,

The immediate catalyst for the development of Vision 2020 was downsizing at the Radford Army Ammunition Plant (RAAP). However, the downsizing was in many ways simply the straw that broke the camel's back. For the past fifteen years, citizens, business and community leaders have watched an ever-widening gap between the urban and rural areas of Virginia. This gap is shown by disparate levels of income, employment, primary education, and growth. (p. 1)

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The Vision 2020 report goes on to explain how at the time of publication, 34% of residents in the NRV commute from their home jurisdiction to a neighboring jurisdiction (also located in the NRV) to work. For instance, a resident of Pulaski County may commute to work in Radford City on a daily basis. For this reason, layoffs in the NRV are felt region-wide and create a ripple effect (Virginia's New River Valley Vision 2020, 1995).

According to the New River Valley Regional Commission, "The region is growing from a manufacturing and agrarian focused economy into a more balanced, diversified economy" (New River Valley CEDS, 2017, p. 2). While a shift in the region's industries may be on the horizon, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership's 2017 Labor Market Report cited the manufacturing industry as the second largest employment sector in the NRV, only second to the government sector (Virginia Economic Development Partnership, 2018). In 2009, the manufacturing industry employed about 11,000 workers in the NRV behind education (government) with 13,500 workers (Duncan & Sturgeon, 2009). As of 2018, the services offered by major employers in the NRV are explosives, motor and drive systems, engine bearings, textiles, furniture, trucks, and higher education. Looking at the long-term industry employment and projections provided by the Virginia Employment Commission, by the year 2024, these major industries are projected to decrease from 231,497 employees in the NRV to 219,778 employees, a decrease of 11,719 (Virginia Employment Commission, Economic Information & Analytics, Long Term Industry and Occupational Projects, 2015).

The NRV Livability Initiative Interim Report (2012) notes that "jobs in manufacturing have been decreasing while jobs in professional, scientific, and technical services have been increasing" (p. 6). Evidentially, jobs in manufacturing have been decreasing for some time now. According to the New River Valley Planning District Commission's 1995 report, from 1989 until

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1992, the plant layoffs and subsequent closure of American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T) caused a loss of 1,000 jobs in the NRV. In that same time span, Radford's Army Ammunition Plant laid off 900+ employees, Sara Lee laid off 230 employees, Wolverine laid off 45 employees, and Virginia Tech had a layoff that affected 390 employees (Virginia's New River Valley Vision 2020, 1995). That brings layoffs in a short span of 3 years to over 2,500. Unfortunately, that was not the end of the downturn in jobs in the NRV. From 2006 to 2011, there was a 48% job loss in the transportation equipment manufacturing industry, a 38% percent loss in the primary metal manufacturing industry, and a 16% loss in the apparel and textiles sectors (NRV Livability Interim Report, 2012).

Even in examining the most recent data ranging from February 2016 to May 2017, a total of 1,699 employees in the NRV have been affected by layoffs. This data only included layoffs from two organizations during the time span, with 1,553 of the layoffs coming from Volvo Trucks North America and 146 from Nordson Xaloy (Virginia Economic Development Partnership, 2018). According to Korth (2015), the 1.6-million-square-foot Pulaski County Volvo truck manufacturing facility is the largest in the world and the birthplace of every Volvo tractor-trailer on North American highways. Changes in the economy caused that layoff. Similarly, Nordson Xaloy, a polymer processing manufacturer, consolidated its NRV plant into a single manufacturing center in Austintown, Ohio, for "competitive reasons" ("Nordson closing Pulaski Xaloy facility," 2016).

Understanding why the layoffs occurred is not always clear, and often there is not just one explanation. For AT&T, the company that closed in 1991 after laying off 1,000 employees, it was a matter of economics and technology permitting the same amount of work to be done by

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fewer people (Hamilton & Swoboda, 1991). William Warwick, who at the time served as the president of microelectronics manufacturing had this to say:

There was nothing the people in [the] New River Valley could have done to offset the economic advantages of putting that work into Dallas [Texas]. It was not a matter of their skills, their dedication or their efficiency. It was based on economics. (Hamilton & Swoboda, 1991, para. 7)

Approximately 100 workers transferred from Radford to Texas when AT&T shut down its NRV assembly plant. That still left 900 employees in the NRV lost, confused, and unsure of their next source of income.

For Volvo's 2009 layoff, it was not the layoff itself that shocked employees; it was the number that came as a surprise (Duncan & Sturgeon, 2009). Volvo Trucks North America laid off 650 workers, or 40% of the remaining work force, in March and April of 2009. That layoff came on the heels of a decline in U.S. sales of heavy trucks for the second consecutive year (Duncan & Sturgeon, 2009). According to an article published in *The Roanoke Times*, "U.S. retail sales of class 8 trucks, the kind Volvo's Pulaski County plant makes, fell nearly 12 percent in 2008 to 133,473 vehicles" (Duncan & Sturgeon, 2009). After announcing an expansion plan in 1999, the assembly plant employed 3,225 people. A decade later, the number of employees fell to fewer than 1,000 after several layoffs throughout the intervening years (Duncan & Sturgeon, 2009, para. 7). Volvo Trucks North America is well-known for laying off and rehiring employees as the trucking industry fluctuates. In 2015, the Pulaski County plant had another massive layoff affecting 734 production employees (Korth, 2015). As expected, these layoffs by Volvo not only negatively affected the NRV economy, but they also dampened the efforts being made to attract major companies to this rural region.

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Celanese, a global company that produces chemicals and coatings to be used with other products, has a plant located in Giles County (Jordan, 2016). Perry Aliotti, the District Sales Manager, said, “In the New River Valley, Celanese has benefited from loyal employees with diverse skill sets and tremendous dedication of (sic) our success” (Virginia Economic Development Partnership, 2018, p. 8). Still, those employees were not exempt from a layoff. In the fourth quarter of 2016, 27 members of the Giles County manufacturing facility’s work force were unexpectedly laid off. The reason was due to a reduced demand for a filtering material that is used in cigarettes (Jordan, 2016). Celanese has been in the NRV for more than 75 years, according to Jordan’s 2016 featured article in the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. It appears that even when employees are loyal and have diverse skill sets, these characteristics simply cannot withstand the plague of layoffs in this area.

As a communication student, I am interested in how the negative organizational changes were communicated to employees and the community by the corporations involved. The sudden, unexpected loss of jobs in Appalachian industries over the last several decades has had lasting effects on the well-being of the newly unemployed, their families and life responsibilities, and also on the economy. Watson (1974) found that for local communities during that time period, layoffs could entail a decline in population, a loss of local trade, and a steep decline in tax revenues. Those effects are still the case today. In some areas within the NRV, the economy has sadly still not made a full recovery from previous layoffs, with unemployment rates remaining higher than elsewhere in the Commonwealth. According to the Virginia Employment Commission’s 2016 report, unemployment in the NRV totaled 4.6%, while the state of Virginia’s average was 4.1%. That is a difference of .5%. This gap of unemployment in the NRV compared to the state is far less than 2009’s data where the NRV’s unemployment rate was 8.3%

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and the state of Virginia's unemployment rate was 7.1% — a difference of 1.2%, the largest gap in a decade (Virginia Employment Commission, Economic Information & Analytics, Long Term Industry and Occupational Projects, 2015). While these effects might be expected, the sudden, involuntary loss of their jobs was unexpected to those laid off.

Because of this, for this thesis research I interviewed the people who have undergone these traumatic life changes. Additionally, one manager was also interviewed to gain insight from the perspective of those who made and communicated the decisions about layoffs. I also examined practices that could have been incorporated into the declining organizations prior to the devastating layoffs and closures, and sought to learn more about the proper ways to communicate during such difficult, life-altering times. My hope is that this information and the communication strategies discovered through the literature review can be disseminated to regional organizations and may, at some point, prove useful to them and their employees if they are faced with closure or downsizing.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to bring together previous research about the factors that corporations should consider or follow during times of organizational change, specifically downsizing. The ways in which the remaining organizations in the New River Valley choose to communicate with their employees, and the communities in which they are located when there is a need to downsize, needs to be reviewed and reconsidered because so many linking factors rest on the effectiveness of that communication. In this literature review, I set out current research about the communication processes that occur during organizational change, and specifically during an organizational crisis, and how communication can best be used with employees and in communities during such transitions.

Corporate Change

Changes within organizations can occur in many forms, each having varying, lasting effects on both employers and employees. In many southwest Virginia organizations, one such form that results in many harsh consequences is downsizing. Kim (2003) stated that downsizing, unfortunately, is now a way of life for many companies in order to remain in business and competitive in the workforce. Many organizations see it as a feasible way to cut costs and appropriate funds to another area of need within the company. While about 25% of the companies in her study did see a financial improvement, the biggest “benefit” gained from downsizing was anxious, angry, and depressed workers and former workers (Kim, 2003).

Adjusting to the changes that downsizing inevitably evokes can be difficult. More than 40 years ago, Watson (1974) wrote that when individuals are without meaningful work for extended periods, their attitudes change from optimism to pessimism to fatalism. Employees

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develop expectations of employers, and when those expectations fall short, occupational cynicism is the result (Yuxia, 2013). Cynicism about organizational change, or CAOC, refers to the loss of enthusiasm to serve and the loss of pride for the job. According to Yuxia (2013), CAOC results from situational factors and stems from psychological contract violations. Vance, Brooks, and Tesluk (1996) proposed that organizational cynicism is the belief that fixable problems on the job will not be fixed due to reasons that the individual cannot control. The major factors in employee change-specific cynicism are lack of trust in administration, lack of control over change, and lack of information about change (Yuxia, 2013).

Based on this literature, I have formulated my first research question:

RQ1: How have organizations in the New River Valley communicated layoffs to their employees?

Corporate Communication

Ineffective communication habits within an organization have been linked to many dysfunctional organizational consequences (Haas, 2007). Appelbaum (1999) explained that restructuring decisions, along with poor communication practices, are associated with disloyalty, increased absenteeism, disaffection, and potentially even acts of sabotage by workers. Those poor communication practices during a restructuring process often result in workers that become confused, insecure, and angry (Guiniven, 2001). While some organizational changes are inevitable, what is controllable are the ways in which employers discuss those changes with their employees. As early as 1949 Stessin granted that in the past, “‘shock’ method—a cold announcement on a bulletin board, a pink slip—was standard procedure. But many companies are now showing a greater sense of responsibility” (p. 21). As this study seeks to discover, is this greater responsibility the case, even today, in the NRV? From a corporate perspective, Warnick

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(2010) found that CEOs rarely use concrete, clear language in layoff memos, even though that is what employees prefer. Many CEOs downplay the negative news with hopeful (and sometimes unrealistic) future predictions.

Bordia, Hunt, Paulsen, Tourish, and DiFonzo (2004) wrote that the quality of management-led communication will have an impact on the amount of uncertainty experienced by employees, control perceptions, and satisfaction on the job. When communication practices are weak, it not only negatively affects those laid off, but it also plays a role in the response of employees still employed by the organization. Layoff survivors, according to Ritchey and Turner (2001), become more withdrawn, are not as committed to the organization, and are overall less satisfied with their jobs when they are close to those laid off or when they do not believe the layoffs were handled justly. In unfortunate and unprofessional settings where employees hear of layoffs through workplace discussions instead of from management, it destroys morale, company loyalty, and both quality and speed of production on the job.

Haas's (2007) study illustrated that two-way symmetrical communication is best suited to be used in times of organizational changes, like restructuring. Two-way symmetrical communication places an emphasis on interpersonal communication and conversation between management and workers and gives opportunities for interactions that can potentially influence existing decisions. This two-way model of communication implies that workers will be able to communicate and maintain a measure of control in their workplace (Haas, 2007).

Communicating to employees after layoff decisions have been made has been a point of conflict for many organizations. Finding the right words is not easy to do, and sometimes there simply are not any "right" words. From his research, Kline (2006) found that employers prefer equivocally worded responses more than direct responses in what he termed avoidance-

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avoidance conflict scenarios. Avoidance-avoidance scenarios are characterized by a negative situation where a response must be made, even if it, too, is negative. In this situation, a clear and direct reply will be avoided because it will be negative. For this reason, very little will be said at all, thus avoiding the issue at hand (Kline, 2006). In other words, equivocal communication is strategic, non-straightforward language that if answered with clear, direct communication, could cause negative repercussions. The lack of a response can indicate that the organization is not in control of the situation and also that it is allowing its constituents, employees in this case, to define the issue as they believe it to be.

Based on Kline's study, the following two research questions are set forth:

RQ 2: What type of language was used in the communication of the layoffs?

RQ3: How do layoff survivors respond after a layoff?

Corporate Social Responsibility

Employees are defined as pivotal stakeholders and their perceptions are central to corporate social responsibility (CSR) (O'Connor, Paskewitz, Jorgenson, & Rick, 2016). According to these researchers, CSR is an explicit and implicit contract that outlines the responsibilities an organization has to its workforce, among other constituents. CSR is viewed as a reciprocal relationship developed over time and employee understandings of CSR are directly linked to organizational structure (value chain positioning) (O'Connor et al., 2016). Corporate success is highly dependent on how much attention organizations give to the three P's – planet, people, and profit (Bhattacharya, Sen, & Korschun, 2011). Crifo and Forget (2015) even concluded that CSR is a strategic necessity for organizations to survive in this interconnected world. While Bhattacharya et al. (2011) agreed that CSR has the potential to be costly, the benefits it presents positively affect the stakeholders and shareholders – including employees.

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Turker (2009) named the employee as one of the most important internal stakeholders, despite receiving the least amount of attention in relation to CSR. He developed a CSR scale with four dimensions: customers, employees, society, and government. Prior to this scale, employees were often left out of the CSR discussion. Employee morale is highly impacted by CSR, according to Briggs and Verma (2006). When employee morale is high, trust within the organization will also follow (Schoenberg, 2007). With trust, employers will be able to sustain the loyalty of employees as well as their commitment to the organization's mission. Preuss and Haunsch (2008) also agreed with the importance of employees and stated that employee issues such as safety, wages, and benefits were central to perceptions of CSR. In many ways, employees act as CSR ambassadors for the organization within the community (Collier & Esteban, 2007).

When companies satisfy employees' expectations about CSR, they should expect to see improved attitudes on the job, increased productivity, and a reduction in turnovers (Trevino & Nelson, 2004). Fombrun, Gardberg, and Barnett (2000) even noted that organizations with positive CSR reputations attracted stronger job applicants and retained high-quality employees. Buciuniene and Kazlauskaite (2012) found that organizations that valued employee engagement, and placed it at the center of their CSR activities, also increased their profitability. Mohr and Deborah (2005) discovered that some of the internal factors that affect an organization's reputation included employee welfare, transparency, and adaptability to change.

While CSR sounds good in theory, Wagner and Wertz (2009) found that deviations between public CSR statements and negative business practices that get exposed can have dramatic effects on an organization's image and sales. In terms of the current study, that means the relationship between CSR and the layoff communication has to overlap somewhere. It is the

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social responsibility of organizations to maintain a favorable reputation among all stakeholders, including employees. That means that organizations must ensure that all encounters with employees are handled with care, compassion, and respect, even when that means employees might lose their jobs in mass numbers.

Whether organizations want to acknowledge it or not, having the ability to openly and honestly communicate with employees during transitional times is a part of their CSR. Now more than ever, employees are demanding what they deserve and when not presented with it, they are not afraid to voice those concerns on social platforms. The ways employers handle mass layoffs can speak louder than any formative act of kindness during an employee's tenure. Employees deserve the same respect employers would want if the roles were reversed. Lack of proper handling by employers during these transitional times can send their organization into a spiral of issues that can prove to be even more detrimental than the costs to continue employing everyone.

These studies about CSR lead me to the following research question:

RQ4: To what extent is CSR valued within Appalachian organizations?

Issues Management

Every organization is susceptible to the receipt of some negativity (Cho & Kim, 2012). Sometimes this occurs through activist groups, governments, media, or even constituents and stakeholders. By definition, issues management is “a proactive and systematic approach to predict problems, anticipate threats, minimize surprises, resolve issues, and prevent crises” (Wilcox & Cameron, 2007, p. 256). Perhaps in more plain language, an issue, simply stated by Berg and Feldner (2017), occurs when there is a gap between corporate actions and stakeholder expectations. Berg and Feldner (2017) concluded that stakeholders are demanding more

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transparency from corporations and, as a result, corporations must continually participate in issue management and legitimacy building. According to Jones and Chase (1986), an issues management approach includes identifying and analyzing an issue, deciding strategic options, creating a timeframe, executing an action, and then assessing the action taken.

When organizations are faced with laying off their employees, they are dealing with an issue that must be managed. Layoffs, especially those that come suddenly and without warning, have negative trickle-down effects for all involved. Ulmer's (2001) findings suggested that CSR has a halo effect in regard to issues management. Ulmer (2001) believed that a company's favorable image built by previous CSR involvement has the ability to prevent it from damage resulting from an isolated negative event. The halo effect is defined as the influence of an evaluation of a person or object on its attributes (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). That then suggests that CSR as an issues management effort has a halo effect on the public's response to an issue involving the organization. Cho and Kim (2012) proposed that CSR activities that occurred during positive times may be used as "insurance" against any negative issues that may arise in the future. Massive layoffs may be better understood, or even forgiven, if organizations met their CSR to their employees prior to laying them off. In that situation, issues may turn out neutral, as opposed to negative for organizations.

Based on this literature, I have formulated my fifth research question:

RQ5: How far in advance of the layoffs or closures did employees learn of them?

Organizational Legitimacy

Suchman (1995) defined legitimacy as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (p. 574). Organizations can use a variation of

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legitimizing mechanisms to boost their reputation as ethical entities (Long & Driscoll, 2008).

Such mechanisms can come in the form of ethics training, the presence of ethics officers, or most commonly, through a code of ethics, according to Long and Driscoll (2008). Research conducted by Meyer and Rowan (1997) suggested that organizations that have a code of ethics are viewed to be more legitimate. Unfortunately, they also found that a code of ethics can simultaneously be used with insincerity by organizations that adopt them.

Legitimacy is granted when either an organization's goals conform to social norms, or when the steps an organization takes to complete its goals are deemed proper (Long & Driscoll, 2008). Alternatively, illegitimacy takes place when organizations' actions "are seen as undesirable or as violating societal norms" (Patterson & Watkins-Allen, 1997, p. 293). To prevent an illegitimate label, organizations must work hard to maintain a legitimate image.

Legitimacy management, according to Massey (2001), is an ongoing approach that involves gaining, maintaining, and sometimes even regaining legitimacy for the organization. It is most successfully managed when stakeholder expectations are met with consistent organizational actions. When an organization has earned the title of being legitimate, constituents are far more understanding when negative events occur. Gaining legitimacy is a proactive step that involves three strategies: conforming to the expectations of society, choosing supportive stakeholders, and forming creative ideas related to legitimate behavior (Suchman, 1995).

Chen, Patten, and Roberts (2008) viewed CSR as a means for companies to gain legitimacy. Bachmann and Inghoff (2016) agreed that corporate members had the ability to strengthen their company's legitimacy through widespread CSR disclosures. A pre-existing positive image among shareholders and stakeholders works in the company's favor during times

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of layoff and organization restructuring. Without the credibility of being seen as a legitimate organization, a round of layoffs can seriously hurt the reputation of an organization that has not displayed any positivity in the past. In the unfortunate event that an organization has lost its legitimacy credibility, it can regain legitimacy through CSR disclosures, further emphasizing the importance of CSR (Bachmann & Inghoff, 2016). DeRoeck and Delobbe (2012) found that “a strong engagement in CSR initiatives can, even in controversial industry sectors, support organizational legitimacy” (p. 407).

Corresponding with literature on organizational legitimacy, I ask the final two questions:

RQ6: Do the websites of organizations in the New River Valley explicitly state their values?

RQ7: Are NRV organizations from which the study participants were drawn showing those values in the way they treat their employees during layoffs?

Humane Downsizing

In order to develop best practice suggestions for organizations that may face layoffs in the future, I examined what is called in the literature humane downsizing practices. Research shows that layoff experiences can have significant long-term effects on layoff victims’ attitudes (Lipponen, Steffens, & Holtz, 2018). Also shown in research is the appreciation of explanations detailing how and why the layoffs came to be (Erkama & Vara, 2010). The reality of a layoff can be a little easier to process when it is clearly communicated and those affected are handled humanely.

According to Ribbink (2002), communicating in the aftermath of a layoff is one of the best things employers can do to aid their employees. During such a transitional time filled with uncertainty, employees become particularly thirsty for information. Bradley and Lambert (2009)

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affirmed that “every action during the layoff will be scrutinized by all employees” (p. 2). Ribbink (2002) found that when employers are up-front in their conversations and are open to discuss the guilt, fear, and anger that often accompany the layoff process, it becomes more bearable for all involved. Settles (1988) suggested employers humanize the layoff process by considering alternatives to laying off. The suggested alternatives included reducing the work week, offering an early retirement plan, trimming spending in various departments, establishing a hiring freeze, and introducing part-time or contractual work to full-time employees (Settles, 1988). In agreement, Bradley and Lambert (2009) also believed layoffs should serve as a last resort when all other options have been exhausted.

While all of those suggestions are helpful, in the event that a layoff is still necessary, there are a number of tactics that can be completed by the organization in an effort to soften the blow of layoffs. For one, Settles (1988) recommended establishing guidelines for layoff implementation. These guidelines should include how many days of advance notice employees receive, any severance pay information, and insurance termination dates (Settles, 1988). Moreover, it is recommended that all employees who will be laid off be informed at one time, as opposed to staggered notices (Bradley & Lambert, 2009).

According to Settles (1988), it is important for organizations to brief department managers prior to the layoff. Managers should be informed of their role in the downsizing process and be prepared for the potential emotional outbreaks from affected employees. Supervisors can play an exceptionally important role in shaping the employees’ psychological reactions during critical events (Lipponen et al., 2018). Downs (2018) noted that many poorly implemented layoffs treat employees like children. Managers who deliver the layoff notices must be compassionate and show sincere understanding (Bradley & Lambert, 2009).

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Before the layoff announcement is made, all layoff letters and severance packages should be organized and ready to hand to employees (Bradley & Lambert, 2009). Employees who will be impacted should be notified through their immediate manager and then receive a follow-up letter from human resources (Settles, 1988). In addition, during the notification, employees should be informed of the outplacement program implemented by the organization. Supervisors must work with human resources in order to ensure they adhere to all federal, state, and local laws. Downs (2018) recommended managers communicate what they may consider to be too much, as opposed to withholding information.

In the event that an organization is downsizing and not closing for good, Settles (1988) indicated the organization should conduct a meeting with the remaining employees who will not be affected by the layoff. This meeting's organizers should be able to answer questions that employees will have concerning the layoff and the future of the organization, and should also help defuse low morale. Bradley and Lambert (2009) agreed, stating that layoff survivors need to know what their roles will be in support of the new direction of the organization. If budgets are being reduced and cost saving measures implemented, these changes need to be communicated to the survivors as well.

Next, the organization's outplacement program should be instituted. For some companies, this could include an extension of health insurance for laid off employees, notification of weekly job listings for those displaced, and job search training (Settles, 1988). Bradley and Lambert (2009) pointed out that to assist in finding alternative work, supervisors could also write letters of recommendation that explained that the employee was involved in a layoff.

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Settles (1988) maintained that another crucial component in humanizing the layoff process is to conduct exit interviews. These interviews should be facilitated by human resources with the purpose of obtaining valuable comments and opinions from the exiting employees on the outplacement program and recommendations for organizational changes. The exit interviews should be a continuation of the constant, open, and empathic communication of the organization before, during, and after the layoff (Bradley & Lambert, 2009).

It has been shown that respecting the dignity of employees is essential – particularly so during the restructuring of the organization in the form of a layoff. Work plays an important role in the lives of people. When unavoidable necessities occur, it is imperative that managers do everything in their power to help the employees avoid or at best minimize the accompanying traumas (Watson, 1974). All of the members of the organization should be treated humanely and feel supported (Bradley & Lambert, 2009). Downs (2018) summed it up best:

No one, from the mail room to the boardroom enjoys downsizing; but when the need for a reduction in staff is unavoidable, a layoff can be accomplished in such a way that the problem is fixed and the organization excels (p. 8).

Chapter 3

Methods

Aim of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to identify and explore the channels of communication between employers and employees during organizational changes – specifically, layoffs and closures in the New River Valley. It has been proven that layoffs and downsizing impact employees' trust, behavior, and their relationship with and perception of management both during and after the organizational change (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2013). The study sought to better understand both the employees who were laid off and the employers who were faced with laying off the employees. In this chapter, I will discuss the research design, interview guide, and the data collection processes in preparation for interpreting the results.

Although layoffs and unemployment are common in the NRV, very little research exists on how the information is communicated to employees in general or how businesses in the NRV specifically handle layoffs. This qualitative study examined the climate of the organizations prior to layoffs in addition to efforts made by organizations after layoffs occurred. The hope was to use data gathered through interviews detailing the interviewees' experiences, in conjunction with the literature on humane downsizing to compile best practice suggestions for use in the unfortunate, but likely case that layoffs occur in the NRV in the future.

In addition to interviews and humane downsizing materials, a content analysis was conducted. Based on findings by Herring (2004), content analysis is typically used by scholars in communication to analyze written mass media content. For this study, the content analysis sought to analyze some of the organizations present in the NRV by examining their statements of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and organizational values when that information was

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present on organizational websites. When these statements existed online, the analysis of them assisted in answering research questions six and seven in relation to CSR and organizational values.

Research Design

Interviews. First, qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to understand the communication practices used during layoffs. “Qualitative research is especially helpful when it provides us with someone’s perceptions of a situation that permits us to understand his or her behavior” (Krathwohl, 1998, p. 230). Qualitative data, with its emphasis on experiences, are well-suited for finding the meanings people place on events and processes. The data collected through open-ended questions and interviews reveal the way things are or describe what is (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). In this case, I felt that conducting interviews would suit my need to interact with the participants and create a space where they could share their experiences.

For this study, open-ended semi-structured interview questions were used. Semi-structured interviews are favored when seeking spontaneous, candid responses. Semi-structured interviews empower the researcher to ask follow-up questions concerning different elements on the topic (Motjahed, Nunes, Martins, & Peng, 2014). For me, this allowed for the exploration of feelings, reflections, and perceptions. With the participants’ permission, all interviews were recorded.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who I knew in the community and who had previously discussed having been laid off in the past. Typically, purposive sampling is used in qualitative studies that conduct focus groups and in-depth interviews (Setia, 2016). A disadvantage of purposive sampling is that the sample is not randomly selected. Random

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samples are best when seeking to explain or predict, rather than describe (Marshall, 1997). For this study the goal of the research was to describe, and participants were selected purposively to address the research questions specific to this study. In addition, a subset of purposive sampling called snowball sampling was incorporated after many participants put me in contact with coworkers and friends who also were laid off. Snowball sampling is a valuable sampling method for accessing hard-to-reach populations (Setia, 2016). In snowball sampling methodology, individuals identify others they know with similar characteristics and refer them to the researcher (Setia, 2016). Snowball sampling hardly leads to representative samples, but it is sometimes the only way to reach hard-to-reach populations (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any time. Interested participants signed and returned the form, expressing their willingness to participate (see Appendix A).

Content Analysis. Second, content analysis was used in order to properly analyze the messages disseminated online by some of the top employers in the NRV, some of which also may have had a layoff and served as the current or former employer of one or more interviewees. In order to find organizations for the content analysis, I utilized the Virginia Economic Development Partnership Report (2018), which published a list of the 12 major employers in the NRV. From this list of major employers, I visited their respective websites in search of their value statements. I found values present on the websites of eight out of 12 of those major employers. In the same manner for CSR, I visited the websites of the 12 major employers in search of CSR statements. I found that six of the 12 major organizations in the NRV made mention of CSR on their websites.

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The unit of analysis was the website for each of the major employers in the NRV. The continuous variable of values was examined for each unit of analysis. The measure was the existence of values on the website.

Interview Guide

To better understand the large number of layoffs in the area, I interviewed local residents who were directly affected. Emails were sent to many individuals I knew from conversations during my time in the area had been affected by a layoff. The email described the study and what was required of them to participate. To those who I did not email, but asked personally, upon meeting to conduct the interview, I briefed them on the study and the requirements. All interviews took place in a mutually agreed on location in the NRV. I conducted face-to-face interviews guided by the interview questions that can be found in Appendices B and C. These interviews were primarily conducted over spring break — the week of March 5. According to Karthwohl (1998), interviews can be used to determine how respondents perceive their situation, its meaning to them, what is significant to them, what might be significant to others, and how it came to be what it is. The interviews I conducted were intended to openly discuss the participants' specific and individual ties to the organizations, the sentiment surrounding the layoffs, and the communication during the layoffs.

Data Collection

Any data collected or stored electronically in the form of a Word document or audio file was stored on a flash drive that was password-protected by me. I gathered the data in a conversational manner in an effort to encourage participants to be open and honest in their responses. I protected the integrity of the research by following professional ethics. During the study, I protected participants by obtaining their informed consent and by explaining the purpose

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and implications of the study and the security of the data. The collection process consisted of tape-recorded interviews, my hand-written notes, informal emails, and face-to-face interviews.

I conducted 15 in-depth interviews with 14 individuals who came from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds and crossed a range of ages and years of experience. The number of interviews conducted was determined by how long it took to reach saturation in the answers received. The goal was to include individuals who were representative of several different corporations that underwent layoffs and closure. Although I attempted to interview three groups of individuals (employees who were laid off, managers who delivered the news, and managers who delivered the news and were also laid off), I only had participants who fell into two of the three interview groups: employees who were laid off and managers who delivered the news. The interview questions, which can be found in Appendices B and C, served as a guide for the conversations with employees and managers.

Chapter 4

Research Findings and Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the communication used by organizations in the New River Valley during a layoff, and through the review of organizational values and corporate social responsibility (CSR) literature, to develop suggestions of best practices that can be used in future layoffs. After the interview data were collected from the participants in the study and transcribed, the findings were applied to the research questions addressed in the study. The responses of the 14 participants and 15 total interviews are presented as answers to the preceding research questions.

Demographics of Participants

For this study, 14 participants from different backgrounds and with different job skills were interviewed. The participants consisted of current and/or former construction workers, physician assistants, truck assembly plant workers, sewing machine operators, manufacturing plant workers, administrative assistants, chefs, explosive plant workers, and IT support. Participants were either a native or long-term resident of the NRV and each of their layoffs subsequently occurred from organizations located in the NRV. In total, there were 12 different organizations from the NRV represented in this study.

The participants ranged in age from 32 to 84. Of the 14 participants, six were male and eight were female, five White and nine Black. The organization names and the participant names have been kept confidential. The participants in the study included 13 individuals who had been laid off, some more than once, and one manager who had participated in the communication process of laying off employees. The total number of interviews was 15, due to one participant's recount of two layoff experiences from two separate organizations.

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Research Question 1

How have organizations in the New River Valley communicated layoffs to their employees?

Information collected from the participants for this research question were from answers to Interview Questions 7 and 9. In Interview Question 7, participants were asked, “What type of communication, if any, took place on a periodic basis about work news, events, and changes within the organization?” Table 1 summarizes the responses.

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Table 1

Workplace Communication Methods

	Periodic meetings	Newsletters	Word of mouth	Very little or no communication
<i>Participant A</i>	Every two weeks Face-to-face town hall discussion			
<i>Participant B</i>	Monthly department meetings	At first received newsletters and then they stopped		
<i>Participant C</i>				Supervisors only talked when they felt there was something that needed to be addressed
<i>Participant D</i>	<i>Layoff Experience 1:</i> Meetings were held, but not often <i>Layoff Experience 2:</i> Monthly meetings were held in addition to seminars			
<i>Participant E</i>			News mostly through word of mouth. Can't remember if meetings were held	
<i>Participant F</i>	The union met monthly and the company met weekly			
<i>Participant G</i>	Department meetings held once a month			
<i>Participant H</i>				No communication between organization and employees
<i>Participant I</i>	Bi-weekly meetings were held with supervisors	Newsletters were sent out weekly		
<i>Participant J</i>	Weekly meetings			
<i>Participant K</i>	Town hall meetings			
<i>Participant L</i>	Meetings with supervisors			
<i>Participant M</i>	Department meetings were held every Monday and the company met quarterly			
<i>Participant N</i>	Monthly meetings were held			

Eleven of the laid off participants stated that their organization held periodic meetings to discuss work news, events, and changes within the organization. These meetings ranged from

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occurring as frequently as weekly, to as infrequently as quarterly. In addition to work meetings, Participant B and Participant I also stated that they received newsletters from the organization. Of the two, Participant B stated that over time, the newsletters became less frequent, and then suddenly stopped. Participant E explained that they received their news through word of mouth and did not recall meetings occurring. Participant C, a former employee of a company that created metal for cars, stated that their supervisors only met with them to address an issue or concern. Participant H, a former construction worker, indicated that the organization did not communicate with employees in any manner on a regular basis.

In Interview Question 9, the participants were asked, “How was the layoff notice received?” Figure 1 summarizes the responses.

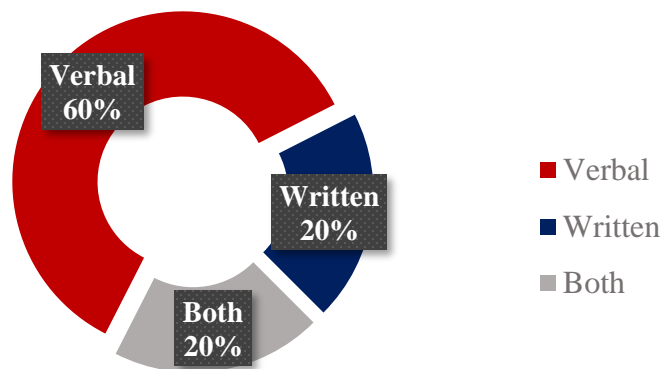


Figure 1. How the layoff notice was received.

This particular interview question received some overlap in responses. Participant A, the only manager in the study, stated that in his current role, he has delivered layoff notices solely as written statements and solely as a verbal conversation in person, but typically delivers them both in a verbal conversation followed up by a written letter. Participant A also introduced a method of layoff notice that he has used that I did not consider: over the telephone. Nine of the participants only learned of their layoff through an in-person conversation. These nine did not

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receive a written letter. Three of the participants in this study only received notice of their layoff in a written letter. They did not have an in-person discussion about their layoff.

This lack of consistency clearly goes against humane downsizing practices. As seen in the literature review, according to Settles (1988), “Employees who will be impacted should be notified through their immediate manager and then receive a follow-up letter from human resources” (p. 16). That means that had layoff notices been given humanely, all employees affected would have learned of their layoff through an in-person conversation, followed by notice in written form.

Research Question 2

What type of language was used in the communication of the layoffs?

Answers to this research question were obtained through prompts throughout the duration of the interviews. Although no particular question specifically asked about language, through follow-up questions and conversations, participants recounted all they could about the communication of the layoff. Since most of the participants received verbal notices of their layoff, many did not recall exact language. Even those who also received written layoff notices could only recount certain aspects. For a number of participants, receiving news that they were getting laid off was a blurred memory. In the moment, many of them felt the news, instead of hearing it or reading it. Participant B, a White male who was employed at one company for 42 years before being laid off, did not hear of any rumors prior to the layoff. He reported that he came into work as usual on a Friday, and he, along with every other employee, was told not to return. “And they couldn’t tell us how long it would be or if we would ever come back,” Participant B remembered.

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Participant B was not the only one who was caught off guard. Participant C, a Black female who, as noted in Table 1, said that supervisors only held meetings when something needed to be addressed, was also shocked to hear that she was being laid off without warning after 26 years with the company. She detailed that after working a typical 8-hour day, her supervisor told her that he wanted to have a meeting with her. In this meeting, she was told that her job was being phased out. Additionally, she remembers them telling her, “You’ll get 26 weeks’ severance pay, your five weeks’ vacation pay, and if you want to keep the insurance, it’ll be \$400 a month,” as if to console her. The experience left her devastated and she went home crying. Others in the study did not have a problem with the way that their layoff was communicated.

Participant I, a 32-year-old White male who was employed for just shy of a year before being laid off, described, “They shut the plant down and gathered everyone in the loading zone and did the whole spiel of market shares down, order boards down – right now it’s not fiscally responsible to keep this many people on board.” He acknowledged:

They didn’t say it just like that, but by no means was it mean or crass or bad. And then following that, our supervisors came around and handed us a sheet of paper letting us know what was going on and how we were to proceed, as well as contacts to claim our benefits with the VEC [Virginia Employment Commission] and people to contact if we had any questions about what was to happen next. (Participant I)

Participant L, a 64-year-old Black woman who was employed for 30 years and was laid off twice from the same company – both times temporarily – felt that the communication about the layoff was open. As a member of the union, she was required to be given ample notice of when the layoff would occur. She stated that she knew months before the layoff was going to

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occur. “I just didn’t walk in and I was gone,” she gratefully reflected. Unlike many at her company, Participant L was told that she would be getting called back; she just did not know when exactly.

Whether notified verbally or in writing, 13 of the 14 participants in the study recalled having known exactly what their status with the company was going forward. Participant B, the only exception, was not told what his future with the company would hold. This leads me to believe that primarily, the language used was clear and straightforward. Concrete, clear language in layoff memos is what employees prefer, but is seldom what they get (Warnick, 2010). Some organizations were open in telling their employees that the layoffs were due to lack of profit, as Participant I recounted. Others were caught by surprise and not offered any explanation as to why they were being laid off. Often times there are no “right” words, and as Downs (2018) recommended, what may be considered too much information is favored far more than too little.

Research Question 3

How do layoff survivors respond after a layoff?

Participant F and Participant K were the only two layoff survivors in this study. Although both participants had previously gone through multiple layoffs with their organization (they are both employed by the same employer), they were unaffected by the most recent layoff in 2016. Participant K, a Black male who had experienced two layoffs with this company, recalled that the first layoff occurred after he had been employed for 10 months. He was devastated” “It was the first time I’d ever been laid off.” He stated that he had received a 4-year degree and worked in sales prior to employment at this company, but decided to leave his office

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environment with sales and come to a production workplace due to more stability. In the interview, he said,

I left a good job to go to this job to better myself and in 10 months I was laid off. It was a learning experience. I had a family on top of that to take care of. Back then, I had to be there a year to get sub pay. It was a union company so they had what they call a 'strike fund' or a 'sub-check' that helps you out while you're laid off, but I wasn't there long enough for that. And that's what the company would do, they would lay you off before you got your year in so they wouldn't have to pay you anything. (Participant K)

When asked about his survivor's experience with the 2016 layoff, Participant K stated how fortunate he was that he did not have to "deal with all of that." He acknowledged feeling relieved when his name was not included on the list with the most recent layoff, but said he could empathize with those who were affected. He noted that a lot has changed over time with the layoff procedures, such as ample advanced notice and more communication from the organization prior to rumors in the community. Erkama and Vara (2010) wrote that those affected appreciate explanations and details surrounding employment changes, and that was certainly the case with those interviewed for this study. It is also a point that has not changed in the past almost 60 years. As Stessin wrote in 1949,

It was once thought that to give employees a week or two foreknowledge of loss of job would result in interim grumbling, slowdowns, lateness, and absenteeism. That possibility still exists, but the positive effects of advance notice far outstrip the few excesses that may develop. Advance notice helps the worker start thinking of new contacts and job possibilities. (p. 21)

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These efforts made by Participant K's organization seem to be moving closer to more humane practices for handling layoffs. He is just glad that he appears to be in the clear.

Participant F, who has been through a total of three layoffs with her employer, said, "There's some somberness in the plant during those times." She explained that the way in which the organization decided who would be laid off was by seniority. "If you're pretty much the newest person coming in the plant, you know you're going to get laid off," she remembered.

To her satisfaction, the 2016 layoff did not affect her, as she had just celebrated 20 years with the company. Even when she was reassured that she would be keeping her job, she remembered, "Everybody's tone changes. They're uncertain about where they're going to be. People get moved away. People's jobs change." Bradley and Lambert (2009) touched on this, explaining that layoff survivors need to know what their roles will be as they support the new direction of the company. It is recommended that the organization conduct a meeting with layoff survivors in order to answer questions they have about transitions and to resolve the potential for low morale (Settles, 1988).

Research Question 4

To what extent is CSR valued within Appalachian organizations?

Information collected from the interview participants for this research question was from their answers to Interview Questions 4 and 11. Interview Question 4 asked, "How would you describe the climate at your (previous) workplace? Climate meaning the culture/feelings evoked from management to employees. Were employees supported and made to feel valued or was there negativity clouding the work environment?"

As Crifo and Forget (2015) put it, CSR is a strategic necessity for organizations to survive in this interconnected world. Some, like Turker (2009), even name the employee as one

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of the most important internal stakeholders. Participant B, who was unexpectedly laid off after 42 years of employment, still had positive things to say about the culture of his former employer. He reflected on an apprentice program that helped him and others raise their rate of labor and have the opportunity to earn more money.

The manager in the study, Participant A, when asked about the climate at his workplace, had this to say:

I would like to think it's wonderful, but I think anytime there's a management level and an entry-level type, that there's always a discrepancy and a difference of opinion. We try to make a very open-door, open-communication policy and I think sometimes that might be too much information for employees and they spin it their own way.

This statement is in contrast to Downs' advice for managers to communicate what may be considered too much information, as opposed to withholding information (2018). The amount of transparency that an organization exhibits during organizational change can have a direct effect on its reputation (Mohr & Deborah, 2005). According to Appelbaum (1999), restructuring decisions along with poor communication practices have an association with disloyalty, increased absenteeism, disaffection, and potentially even acts of sabotage by workers.

Most of the employees interviewed stated that the climate at their various organizations was "playful," that they were "treated well," and that they enjoyed "working with people from the community." Participant M, a 68-year-old Black female, was laid off from four different foundries. When asked about the climate at the first foundry she was laid off from, she responded,

On a day to day basis it was like a family. They had psychologists that would come in and ask us that question. We knew what was happening to everybody and their families

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and we had happy hours together on Friday nights and we had cookouts together. So, it was a family-oriented thing. (Participant M)

Her recap of this moment was filled with laughter and a smile. I believe CSR to the employees was of value at her organization.

The only truly negative response I received in regard to climate was from Participant C, who did not feel that she was supported or made to feel valued by the company. This sentiment comes from not receiving a raise, despite everyone else getting their raise. She asserted that the reason she never got her raise was because they knew they were phasing out her job.

Interview Question 11 can also reveal the importance of CSR in Appalachian organizations. Question 11 asks, “Did the company make any efforts to assist you in any way after the layoff?” CSR holds organizations accountable for ensuring that all encounters with employees are handled with care, compassion, and respect. Although responses to Interview Question 4 about climate were generally positive, the answers from the participants showed a stark difference in responses to Interview Question 11 about assistance. During the 15 layoffs discussed, 10 organizations provided no assistance to the laid off employees, while only five provided some assistance.

The five respondents who received assistance from their former employers found it in the form of having the opportunity to continue their education at New River Community College, or by connecting them to another employment opportunity. Participant H, a Black man who was laid off from an organization in the construction industry, said his name was “put into a hat” to go to another company. According to him, they hired him immediately. When I asked Participant A if, to his knowledge, his company made any efforts to assist those laid off in any way after the layoff, he replied, “I have seen it happen in many cases. Yeah, maybe if the

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employee wasn't a good fit here but they could be a good fit somewhere else, directing them to other opportunities that are out in the market place." These two experiences certainly appear to positively reflect the value placed on employee CSR within Appalachia.

On the other hand, 10 of the interviewees revealed they did not receive any assistance after the layoff. For many, they were forced to either find another job or try to survive on unemployment. When recalling that difficult time, Participant K shared,

Unemployment was shaky back then. I think it was \$168 a week. And then you had to go out and look for a job and put gas in your car. I was fortunate enough to have some money put aside so it helped me pay things off that I needed to pay off and I didn't lose my house or anything like some people have done. (Participant K)

The overall sentiment from participants regarding the lack of assistance from their organizations was that of disappointment.

Although collectively employees are named as one of the most important internal stakeholders, they typically receive the least amount of attention in relation to CSR (Turker, 2009). With two-thirds of the participants in this study receiving no help from their employers following the layoff, this sentiment seems to hold true. It appears as if organizations in the NRV have in some ways failed to meet their social responsibility to employees who were affected by layoffs and closures.

Research Question 5

How far in advance of the layoffs or closures did employees learn of them?

Data collected from the participants for this research question were from answers to Interview Questions 3 and 6. Interview Question 3 states, "Can you recall when the layoff

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occurred (month/year)?” A scatter plot of their responses answering when their layoffs occurred can be found in Figure 2.

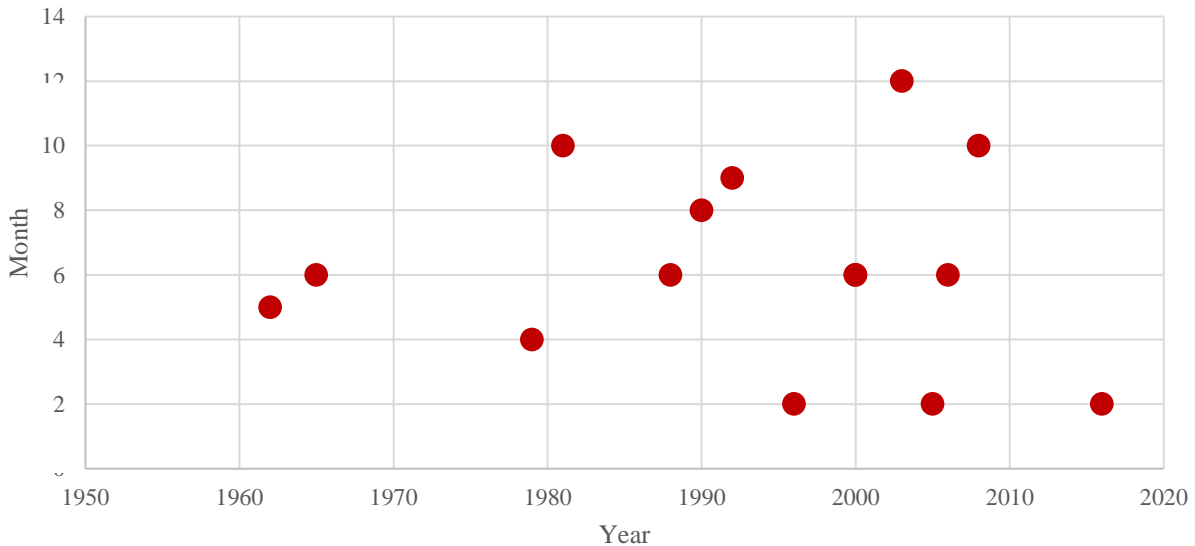


Figure 2. Participant layoff occurrences.

The layoff occurrences for participants in this study ranged from May 1962 until February 2016. Participant A was not included in this question because, as a manager, he was never laid off. At the time of the layoff occurrence, the shortest amount of time worked was Participant K with 10 months on the job. The longest time worked before a layoff occurred was 42 years by Participant B. This question is relevant because, in asking it, many of the participants went on to share more about the timing of the events surrounding the layoffs.

Participant M, the Black female who worked at four foundries, stated that leading up to her first layoff, she knew it was coming 4 years before it occurred. This is her memory:

During my 16 years I had eight bosses. They kept bringing somebody in who they thought was going to save the place, but it didn't work out that way. Also, leading up to that, when we would ship a part you have to test a part for 6 months before you make it. So, when we would ship a pattern for that part for one of our sister plants, and we kept

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shipping them and shipping them, then you know they're trying to phase your plant out. And we knew that probably four years before it really happened because our flow was going down. Now leading up to the final closure – we called it black Friday because every Friday a supervisor would get laid off at lunchtime and when we came back they'd be gone. And then they would double up on the supervisors. (Participant M)

Most of the study participants could not quite remember how far in advance they had been notified. In their answers, the average time frame for notification was 4-6 weeks. As mentioned earlier, Participants B and C were notified on the day that was to be their last day. Both of them expressed deep sorrow and confusion for the sudden notice. Figure 3 below summarizes the responses.

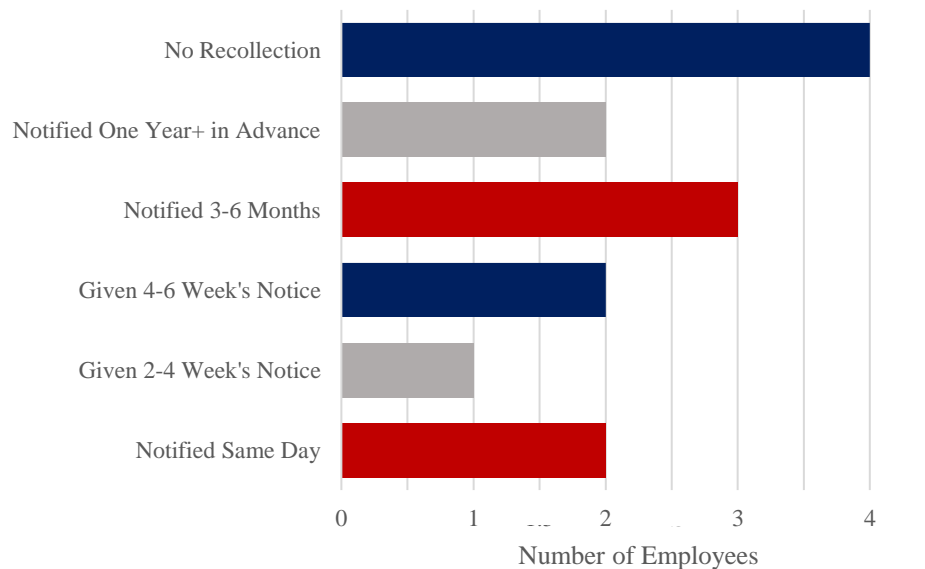


Figure 3. How far in advance of the layoffs or closures do employees learn of them?

The other Interview Question that relates to RQ5 is Question 6. That question asks, “Looking back, did you miss any signs about the unfortunate future of the company?” Overwhelmingly, the short answer to this question was “no.” Eight out of the 14 participants stated that they did not miss any signs about the unfortunate future of the company; the reason

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was rumors in the workplace. As numbers began to fall and changes began to take place, many of the employees I interviewed informed me that they learned about the future of the organization from their coworkers and “word on the street.” Participant K, the Black male who returned to a job in sales after he was first laid off in 1996, had this to say: “Before they actually told us, we had heard rumors of it. You could go to Kroger or Walmart and hear more than you were hearing from the company at the time.” He was not the only one who heard rumors from the rumor mill about his company.

Participant I, a White male who was laid off in 2016 and shortly thereafter enrolled in graduate school at Radford University, stated, “It’s funny because even though it’s such a huge plant, it’s like a high school.” He continued,

There’s gossip that goes on all the time, so weeks leading up to it you’d have people say, ‘Well I heard from my cousin who works there who was standing next to the office of someone who heard’ – that sort of thing. And you’d hear rumors fly around and things that conflict one another. So it was hard to tell which rumors were true. Sometimes, if the source is credible, you can kind of start putting your ear to the ground. Especially since this was a big layoff, a lot of people were talking, trying to confirm if this was true. (Participant I)

The experience for Participant H was drastically different. The 62-year-old, who was working construction at the time, was totally caught off guard by the sudden layoff:

It was a surprise because they’d never laid anyone off in 30 years. They laid three of us off. There was a downturn in the housing market that year. All houses have concrete, and commercial stuff was down. We had finished a big job and basically the housing market just took a downturn. (Participant H)

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In a situation like this, it would be nearly impossible to know of a layoff or closure in advance. In fact, before Participant H could even be warned that it might be on the horizons, it had occurred, without any warning signs.

When employers openly inform employees that a layoff may be soon to come, that knowledge has the ability to potentially decrease the number of issues that arise. The preemptive approach to issues, or issues management, is “a proactive and systematic approach to predict problems, anticipate threats, minimize surprises, resolve issues, and prevent crises” (Wilcox & Cameron, 2007, p. 256). In the event that employers do not address the issue, or layoff, an unfavorable image of the company can result – damaging its reputation. Even when the need for change within organizations comes unexpectedly, employers should nonetheless be somewhat prepared by having guidelines ready and available for layoff implementation. According to Settles (1988), these guidelines should make clear how many days of advance notice employees receive, information on severance pay, and insurance termination dates.

Research Question 6

Do the websites of organizations in the New River Valley explicitly state their values?

A content analysis was used to answer this research question. Table 2 shows the values of a few of the top employers comparable to those in this study – all located in the NRV. The organizations listed in Table 2 serve as representations of the companies where participants in the study worked.

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Table 2

Corporate Values at Top NRV Employers that List Values

	Values as listed on their website
<i>American Electric Power</i>	Our Values: 1. Zero harm 2. Integrity & stewardship 3. Adapt & achieve 4. Customer focus
<i>Celanese</i>	Our Values: 1. Collaboration 2. Creating Customer Value 3. Empowering the World 4. Being Sustainable 5. Employee Growth 6. Shareholder Value
<i>Danaher Corporation</i>	Our Core Values: 1. The best team wins 2. Customers talk, we listen 3. Kaizen is our way of life 4. Innovation defines our future 5. We compete for shareholders
<i>Federal Mogul</i>	Our Core Values: 1. We are a team first 2. We respect, trust and help each other 3. We act with integrity 4. We strive for excellence in all we do 5. We create value through innovation 6. We celebrate our success
<i>Kollmorgen</i>	Our Values: 1. We build extraordinary teams for extraordinary results 2. Customer success inspires our innovation 3. Kaizen is our way of life 4. We compete for shareholders
<i>Radford Arsenal – BAE Systems</i>	Company Strategy – Values: 1. Trusted – We deliver on our commitments 2. Innovative – We create leading-edge solutions 3. Bold – We constructively challenge and take the initiative
<i>Virginia Tech</i>	Core Values: 1. Freedom of inquiry 2. Mutual respect 3. Lifelong learning 4. A commitment to diverse and inclusive communities 5. Ut Prosim 6. Personal and institutional integrity 7. A culture of continuous improvement
<i>Volvo Group</i>	We value: 1. Customer success 2. Trust 3. Passion 4. Change 5. Performance

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A lot of the major employers in the NRV have websites, but not many of the websites explicitly state their values. In searching, I found that organizations that had locations in other states and/or globally, tended to list their values on their websites. In contrast, many of the organizations that were solely located in southwest Virginia did not make mention of organizational values online.

Through the completion of the content analysis, I organized and listed the values of the top 12 employers in the NRV in cases where they were made available on their websites. Of the 12, eight organizations listed their values online. Every organization's values mentioned the importance of the customer in some way – most commonly as “customer success” or “customer focus.” Of the eight, only two of the organizations, Federal Mogul and Virginia Tech, emphasized how much their employees and their personal success were valued (see Table 2). These two organizations are not necessarily organizations from which the study participants were drawn.

Organizational legitimacy is often achieved when the actions of an entity are proper within a constructed system of “norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). These constructed systems, including values, are used to boost the reputation of an organization and improve its image to be more legitimate to both internal and external publics. Additionally, widespread CSR disclosure can serve as another means for companies to gain legitimacy, according to Chen et al. (2008). When an organization has not been credited as being legitimate through the presence of values on its website, a round of layoffs can significantly damage its reputation. Even if this unfavorable situation occurs, an organization has the ability to regain legitimacy through CSR initiatives (DeRoeck & Delobbe, 2012). The benefits of CSR, even

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when costly, positively affect the stakeholders and shareholders – including employees (Bhattacharya et al., 2011).

Research Question 7

Are NRV organizations from which the study participants were drawn showing those values in the way they treat their employees during layoffs?

The answer to this research question was neither yes nor no. The question was answered through the content analysis as well as from Question 10 in the structured interviews.

Interview Question 10 inquired, “If human resources were available at the workplace, were they in contact with you?” This question relates to research question 7 because according to Settles (1988), when humane downsizing techniques are used, human resources should be the second point of contact to a layoff victim, after his/her supervisor informs the individual of the layoff. The interaction that occurs between a human resource representative and the employee being laid off can be a direct reflection of which values are esteemed or not esteemed by the organization. For many companies, a human resources department plays an integral role in maintaining the values of the company (Nowak & Andresen, 2014). For some employees, human resources representatives are some of the first people they come in contact with when starting a job, and some of the last people they are in contact with upon leaving that job. The presence and help of human resources during a layoff can make a world of difference for an employee whose sense of well-being just got taken away from them (Nowak & Andresen, 2014).

When asked about the availability of human resources, many interview participants were unsure if their organizations even had a human resources representative or department at the time of their layoff. According to eight layoff accounts, human resources did reach out to them. The

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other seven did not experience contact with human resources because they were not present at the company either before, during, or after the turmoil of the layoff.

While human resources can be useful for follow-up letters and exit interviews, its presence is not enough. Just being available is not all that employees deserve during a layoff. When asked about the availability of human resources, Participant C stated, “Yeah, the girl from human resources was in there and she wasn’t really that nice. She didn’t have a nice personality at all. But anyway, I was too upset to worry about that.” Participant C’s layoff occurred in February of 2005, yet she still remembers having a negative experience with a member of her company’s human resources department. As not only employees, but ambassadors of the organizations who employ them, human resource officers should be charged to help uphold the values of the organization – especially during a layoff.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

The goal of this study was to focus on the practices that were used to communicate and support employees, and those that could have been incorporated within the declining organizations prior to the layoffs and closures discussed in the previous chapter. The study focused primarily on employees who were laid off in a layoff and downsizing process, and to a lesser degree, on managers whose job it was to inform employees of a layoff and downsizing process, but were not themselves affected by the layoff. Through the interviews, I gathered the common themes of employee concerns and sentiment during the time of their layoff.

The study revealed an overall favorable work climate within organizations in the New River Valley at the time of employment, a few interviewees even citing it as the best job they had ever worked. When reflecting on her experience prior to her layoff from the first organization, a textile plant, Participant D recalled,

The employees, we worked with each other for years. There was very much a family-feel and the supervisors would mingle with employees. I enjoyed working there because we sort of grew up together. I went to work there when I was in my early 20s.

(Participant D)

In a similar manner, Participant M smiled as she said, “We were all friends. I worked for the plant manager and I went to his house for parties and cookouts just like he would come to mine. I knew what I had to do, but we were friends.”

Some of the participants in the study questioned the validity of the layoff, and of larger concern, the values of their organization. Participant L shared this about her layoff experience:

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I knew I was coming back; they just weren't sure how many months it would be; but others didn't. They didn't even give them a percentage of what's the chance of them coming back. There were people who were mad and upset. The whole thing was confusing. It wasn't normal. (Participant L)

For a layoff process to be properly handled, the leaders of the organization must be truthful and loyal to their employees. The uncertainty that Participant L's former coworkers experienced likely had a major impact on their perception of their supervisors and also on the company as a whole.

Community Gossip

The findings of this study unveiled detailed accounts of employee layoff and downsizing experiences from a wide array of employers in the NRV. These experiences ranged from community gossip circulating weeks before individuals were actually laid off, to the rehiring of some fortunate participants. Participant I informed me that at the organization from which he was laid off, supervisors did not talk directly to employees much because one-on-one conversations typically were "more of a disciplinary thing." He said, however, he wishes this wasn't the case, "...especially since this was a big layoff. A lot of people were talking trying to confirm if this was true." Perhaps if more one-on-one conversations were held between employers and employees, rumors would not spread as widely. According to Settles (1988), meetings held by employers provide the perfect opportunity to answer questions concerning an upcoming layoff and defuse low morale.

Having worked at her organization for 20 years, Participant F saw a number of layoffs, even being laid off twice herself. She had this to say about community gossip: "There's always rumors ahead of time, like a month ahead, so you never know exactly when it's going to

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happen.” Her first layoff occurred in the year 2000 and she noted that as rumors began to swirl around the plant, “Everybody’s tone changed.” Appelbaum (1999) noted that ineffective communication routines such as those can be associated with disloyalty, disaffection, and increased absenteeism from employees.

Personal and Professional Effects

The findings exposed the personal and professional effects the participants experienced during and after the layoffs took place. Participant J, laid off in 1990, described how shortly after she was laid off the organization asked her to travel to Dallas, Texas to help train her replacements. “They asked everyone to see if they wanted to move there,” she admitted, but said at that time it was not feasible for her to uproot her family to move to a distant city. Although she could not relocate, she agreed to help train in Dallas because she needed the money. Still today, nearly 30 years after her layoff, she has not been able to find a job that pays as well and that is as flexible as the one from which she was laid off. When asked about how she felt about the layoff and how it was handled, she stated, “I didn’t like it. It was the best place I ever worked. They were really nice to us. We could work all the overtime we wanted and any shift we wanted.”

Participant C was devastated when she was laid off after 26 years with her organization. She recalled her layoff experience to me:

I was told to come to the office to talk to them when I got off. When I went to the office, I was like, ‘What’s going on?’ I was really wary then because they waited until I worked my eight hours and then told me to come to the office. When I got to the office, it was my supervisor and the personnel manager that was filling in for another personnel manager. They sat me down and told me that, ‘As of today, you have no job.’ (Participant C)

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When Participant C asked if she could return to production (where she worked before working in the office), she was denied that opportunity. The treatment she received while being laid off completely crushed her spirits.

For this study, I have presented what the interviewees experienced in their own words through excerpts from the interview transcripts. For some, the layoff experience tore apart the only sense of normalcy they had. The new lack of job, steady income, and well-being wreaked havoc in various areas of some of the employees' lives. For others, the layoff was viewed as a blessing in disguise and came at a time when the employees were unexpectedly needing to care for loved ones or their small children.

Participant E was laid off after 3 years of working at her organization. She admitted that the work was extremely dangerous, but that the pay was "really good." When asked about her feelings after the layoff, she remembered, "I wasn't happy to be unemployed but I had two children (ages 5 and 2). Losing that money was really hard but it gave me an opportunity to spend more time with them." After the layoff, she spent more time with her children, cleaned houses on the side, and completed night classes to get her GED. She then got a job as a housekeeper at Radford University and took one class at a time until she completed her bachelor's degree. In the end, the layoff she experienced gave her more time than she previously had and helped propel her to academic success.

Layoff remains one of the most common methods of downsizing used by organizations both large and small (Walker, 2015). While the economy is in the process of recovering, companies have continued to downsize and lay off employees (Emerson, 2016). In this study, I found that the issue many participants had was not with the layoff, but the communication – or

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lack thereof. The uncertainty that accompanies a workplace plagued with layoff rumors can be draining to the mind, body, and soul.

The recommendations summarized below and the findings outlined in previous chapters will be presented in the form of a brief executive summary that will be shared with managers and human resources officers from the top 12 organizations in the NRV as listed by the Virginia Economic Development Partnership Report (2018). After an initial email or phone call explaining the research, I will send the executive summary via email when available, and through the mail when an email address is not available, to managers and human resources staff. My hope is that with this information available in the concise form of an executive summary, organizations in the NRV may begin to understand the importance of creating and maintaining effective leadership and employee engagement before, during, and after layoffs and downsizing.

As discovered through this research, an organizational strategy that is critical to a successful layoff is to communicate clear messages to the employees (Carriger, 2013). Clear messages are described as being concrete and straightforward, and according to Warnick (2010), they are most preferred by employees. This clear message approach allows employees to properly plan ahead to prepare for the unexpected change in their future.

Implications for Future Layoffs in the New River Valley

This study can contribute to positive social change by recognizing ways to manage the impacts from layoffs and downsizing in southwest Virginia. Its findings and the following recommendations can offer effective forms of organizational communication strategies for employers forced to lay off employees. By examining the insights of 14 laid off employees and one manager who has laid off employees, future researchers can achieve a better understanding

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of the layoff process and the impacts to the laid off employees. Following are specific recommendations to help organizations manage the impacts of layoffs and downsizing:

- 1) Companies should always have an effective communication strategy, or guide, in place for layoff and downsizing announcements. The existence of this strategy will prove useful in the event that a layoff comes unexpectedly. Even when a layoff cannot be predicted, the decision to conduct layoffs should always be communicated to the employees as soon as the decision is made so the employees have time to plan financially, as well as emotionally.
- 2) Transitional times for organizations, be it downsizing or closing, have a way of decreasing trust within the company. It is important for organizations to create a transparent environment in the layoff process by effectively communicating with employees. In these communications, employers should be able to answer all questions truthfully and honestly, as well as provide as much information as possible about the process to employees.
- 3) Organizational leaders, executives, and on-site managers should collaborate with city, county, and regional officials, as well as community leaders, to establish work training programs and workshops within the NRV community. These programs and workshops should provide information about financial resources and assistance to help prepare laid off individuals for career development or retraining and to help them gain the confidence and the motivation needed to pursue potential jobs.
- 4) Organizations also have the opportunity to host in-house training for laid off individuals when a layoff takes place. These classes should be centered around layoff victims' workday schedules and should begin as soon as layoffs are implemented.

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- Financial planning and budgeting sessions should be provided during training to prepare layoff victims for the expected change in income. Information about official last days and benefits should be provided to employees. These sessions may serve to alleviate layoff victims of some of the anxiety and confusion associated with the process.
- 5) Companies undergoing layoffs should work with other companies that are not downsizing to provide them with potential candidates who are experienced and have solid work histories. Organizations forced to lay off employees should consider providing reference letters for laid off employees, as a positive gesture from company leaders.
 - 6) Supervisors and managers should be provided with leadership training on employee engagement and emotional intelligence well in advance of delivering the layoff notices. Employees notified of layoffs can have emotional reactions and outbursts at the news of losing their source of income and well-being. It is important for those who are delivering the notices to be prepared and to act with compassion throughout the process.
 - 7) For layoff survivors, those who will be continuing on the job, organizations can provide information sessions to help them mentally cope with the organizational changes and to assist them with learning new skills for the potential change in workload. These sessions will help to eliminate the stress and worries that the surviving employees may experience after witnessing a layoff.
 - 8) After a layoff decision is made and victims have been informed, organizations can create opportunities for the layoff survivors to openly discuss their experiences and

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suggest areas for improvement, in the event layoffs occur in the future. This not only involves employees in the process, but considers their ideas and adds them to the decision-making process.

- 9) Layoff victims should be provided with a minimum of two weeks' notice of the layoff. Layoff notices should not occur on the same day as the employee's last day with the company. It is imperative that organizations in the NRV treat all employees with dignity and respect during the entire process.

Limitations of the Study

This study, although adding new information to literature about layoff communication in general, and in the NRV specifically, has the following limitations. First, any pre-existing disciplinary warnings/write-ups (administered prior to the layoff) may have had an impact on the organization's ultimate decision. If it came down to a supervisor laying off 30 employees with a disciplinary record or laying off 30 without a record, the supervisor might be more inclined to lay off those with a pre-existing record. Since I did not inquire about the participants' standing in the company prior to the layoff, I cannot take this into consideration.

Another limitation is a lack of variety in participant demographics. Although participants ranged in age from 32 to 84, the majority were over the age of 55, which could have had an effect on their experiences – as their encounters might be dated. Over time, many changes may have taken place with the layoff process of organizations in the NRV. To that point, many of the participants found it difficult to recall some of the specific details surrounding their experiences. More variety in participants' race could have also been useful to the study, as well as more variation in gender of participants. Only interviewing one manager who conducted layoffs is

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also a weakness because it provided the opinions of only that one person, and the perspective from one organization that has survived the layoff process.

Third, the small size of my study could be viewed as a design weakness. Though it may be small, the diverse experiences of participants from different organizations is useful. Nonetheless, due to the small number of participants, this study is not generalizable to other populations. These factors are worth exploring in a future study.

The short amount of time I had to conduct the interviews could also be viewed as a limitation. Essentially, I had 1 week to conduct all 15 interviews. If I had more time, I perhaps could have talked with more individuals, including more managers, and could have received more insightful and more recent information on layoffs in southwest Virginia.

In hindsight, long, unstructured interviews would have been more beneficial to gather insight into the internal processes and perceptions of the layoff victims. While the semi-structured interviews were useful, future interviews should be unstructured to allow participants to recount their experiences without limitations. These experiences could have made a vital contribution to the findings of this study.

Moreover, interview questions should have been tailored more to answer the research questions. While gathering and typing findings from the study, I found some research questions to be more difficult than others to answer. I discovered that this was due to some interview questions being too vague. This also came from the lack of effective follow-up questions and/or answers in some situations.

Lastly, a number of the organizations that laid off participants in the study are no longer located in the NRV. Without them currently being local, I was not afforded the opportunity to contact and possibly speak with managers who may have delivered layoff notices. Of those who

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are no longer located in the NRV, some have gone out of business altogether. This prevented me from potentially evaluating their websites to examine their commitment to CSR and their values.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has provided primary research about communication practices during layoffs in the NRV. Although very informative, especially considering it was uncharted territory, future studies need to be conducted in the following areas:

- 1) The job occupations that are impacted the most by layoffs and presented as a comparison to other occupational types.
- 2) How different participants are affected during layoff periods based on their demographics, including the coping mechanisms they adopt.
- 3) Determining the effectiveness of educational opportunities offered by employers to employees after layoffs.
- 4) Studying the various organizational layoff notification processes for employees and managers and the difference in their effects on those who are laid off.
- 5) Speaking with layoff survivors to hear their experiences during and after the transition within the organization.

Final Thoughts

“At one time in the New River Valley, there were jobs everywhere and then it seems like the whole economy and the whole NRV dropped off in some areas,” Participant G recalled. Her account of the large number of layoffs and closures mirror the sentiments found in the New River Valley Vision 2020 report. In contrast with other regions in the state, the gap shown among disparate levels of growth, income, and employment has existed in southwest Virginia since 1980 (Virginia’s New River Valley Vision 2020, 1995). The findings of this study

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unveiled that while there certainly have been a large number of corporate downsizings and closures, the source of disappointment has been the consistent lack of communication from employers to employees during periods of transition. Layoffs have threatened the quality of many of the participants' lives as well as their financial security. It is my hope that the recommendations provided will prove useful in supplying organizations with solutions to create processes that ease stress and anxiety during layoffs for all who may be involved. Through humane, sensible and responsible approaches to layoffs, organizations can achieve improved public images, earn acceptance by the community, and become better able to attract good employees in the future.

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Appendix A

Participant Consent Form



Adult Informed Consent – Nonsurvey Research

Title of Research: Corporate Communication During Appalachian Industrial Decline and Closure

Researchers: Dr. Lynn Zoch (Email: lzoch@radford.edu) and Breyuana Smith (Email: bsmith344@radford.edu)

We would like to ask you to be in a research study that seeks to identify and explore the channels of communication between employers and employees during organizational changes – specifically, layoffs and closures in the New River Valley. If you choose to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview session that will last no longer than one hour.

During your interview, we will be taking notes and audio-recording your responses so they can be transcribed and analyzed for further analysis. The interviewer will not mention your name or organization during any point of the interview in order to keep your identity and your organization's identity anonymous. Any specific information that is accidentally mentioned about organizations or individuals will be removed from the data when they are transcribed. Finally, the transcription and audio file from your interview will be stored in a password protected, encrypted folder for a minimum of three years.

This study has no more risk than you may find in daily life. If you decide to be in this study, you will benefit from being a part of it by having the liberty to openly and anonymously discuss your experiences and potentially contribute to the prevention of unfavorable communication during layoffs in the future. You can choose not to be in this study at any time, even after you have scheduled a time to be interviewed. If you decide to be in this study, you may choose not to answer certain questions or not to be involved in parts of this study. You may also choose to stop being in this study at any time without any penalty to you. There are no costs to you for being in this study and you will not receive any compensation for taking part in this study.

If at any time you want to stop being in this study, you may leave the study without penalty or loss of benefits by letting the interviewer know during the interview or by contacting Dr. Lynn Zoch by phone at (540)831-6047, through email at lzoch@radford.edu.

If you have any questions about this study, please email or call Dr. Lynn Zoch at any point before your interview is scheduled to take place, or you can wait to ask questions on the day your interview is scheduled. You will be given ample time to ask questions before the interview begins.

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This study was approved by the Radford University Committee for the Review of Human Subjects Research. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject or have complaints about this study, you should contact Dr. Laura Jacobsen, Interim Dean, College of Graduate Studies and Research, Radford University, ljacobsen@radford.edu, (540) 831-5470.

Being in this study is your choice and choosing whether or not to take part in this study will not affect any current or future relationship with Radford University.

If all of your questions have been answered and you would like to take part in this study, then please sign below. This signed hard copy consent form will be provided to you for your keeping.

Name (print)

Date

Signature

I/We have explained the study to the person signing above, have allowed an opportunity for questions, and have answered all of his/her questions. I/We believe that the subject understands this information.

Signature of Researcher

Date



Appendix B

Interview Guides for Employees

Following are the proposed interview guides for the employees in the study:

1. How long did you work at the company you were laid off from?
2. Prior to being laid-off, how long did you imagine you would work there?
3. Can you recall when the layoff occurred (month/year)?
4. How would you describe the climate at your (previous) workplace?
Climate meaning the culture/feelings evoked from management to employees. Were employees supported and made to feel valued or was there negativity clouding the work environment?
5. What was the relationship like that you had with your coworkers and your superiors?
6. Looking back, did you miss any signs about the unfortunate future of the company?
7. What type of communication, if any, took place on a periodic basis about work news, events, and changes within the organization?
8. Please describe all that you can recall about the work environment on the days that led up to your layoff.
9. How was the layoff notice received: written, verbal, or both?
10. If human resources were available at the workplace, were they in contact with you?
11. Did the company make any efforts to assist you in any way after the layoff?

Appendix C

Interview Guides for Managers

Following are the interview guides for the managers:

1. How long have you worked at your present company?
2. What is your job title and what are your job responsibilities?
3. Was there ever a time when you had to inform employees of a layoff? Explain.
4. How would you describe the climate at your workplace?
Climate meaning the culture/feelings evoked from management to employees. Were employees supported and made to feel valued or was there negativity clouding the work environment?
5. What is/was the relationship like that you had with your employees who you supervised?
6. Was the unfortunate future of the company ever communicated to you?
7. What type of communication, if any, took place on a periodic basis about work news, events, and changes within the organization?
8. Please describe all that you can recall about the work environment on the days that led up to you informing employees about the coming layoff.
9. How was the layoff notice delivered: written, verbal, or both?
10. If human resources are available at the workplace, did they reach out to those laid off?
11. To your knowledge, did the company make any efforts to assist those laid off in any way after the layoff?

Appendix D

IRB Approval Letter



Radford University's Institutional Review Board

P.O. Box 6926 Radford, VA 24142 | Phone: (540) 831-5290 | Fax: (540) 831-6636 | irb-iacuc@radford.edu

MEMO DATE: 28-Feb-2018
TO: Smith, Breyuana Ashanti
FROM: Dr. John Brummette jbrummett@radford.edu JB
Radford University IRB
RE: Approval for FY18-076: Corporate Communication During Appalachian Industrial Decline and Closure.
STUDY TITLE: Corporate Communication During Appalachian Industrial Decline and Closure.
IRB REFERENCE #: FY18-076
SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial Application
ACTION: Approved
EFFECTIVE DATE: 27-Feb-2018
EXPIRATION DATE: 26-Feb-2019
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

This is to confirm that the above-referenced study submitted for Expedited Review to Radford University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) has been granted approval.

Your IRB-sanctioned approval ends on 26-Feb-2019, by which date a closure report is due. If you wish to continue your research beyond this date, you must request a continuance no later than 10 days prior to the expiration of this approval. Because your study requires documentation of informed consent, you must use the stamped copy of your approved consent document.

If you should need to make changes in your protocol, please submit a request for modification before implementing the changes. Modifications are made via the InfoEd system. Please contact our office for assistance, if needed.

As the principal investigator for this project, you are ultimately responsible for ensuring that your study is conducted in an ethical manner. You are also responsible for filing all reports related to this project.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. John Brummette at (540) 831-5290 or jbrummett@radford.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Good luck with this project!