

# **Managing Crisis in the Cruise Industry: Using Internal Communications to Foster Workforce Resilience**

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## **Abstract**

### *Purpose*

This paper investigates the use of internal communications to foster workforce resilience in the cruise industry during a crisis. Drawing on Regulatory Focus Theory, this study explores how internal communication strategies can build employee resilience particularly at a time of difficulty. Regulatory Focus Theory explores the employee's rationale for goal pursuit. Prevention-focused individuals are concerned with safety and responsibility while promotion-focused individuals focus on goal advancement. We seek to broaden the existing understanding of the application of Regulatory Focus Theory as a lens to inform internal communications crisis strategies.

### *Design/methodology/approach*

Qualitative research using 15-semi structured interviews with cruise industry experts was undertaken during the pandemic. Applying a sensemaking and sense giving approach the researchers thematically analyzed the data in three stages allowing for new theoretical insights to be uncovered.

### *Findings*

The findings suggest that internal communication strategies should include prevention-focused messages emphasizing the cruise companies' responsibility to employees, and promotion-focused communications, to include social interaction and individual growth opportunities.

### *Originality*

This study's contribution is three-fold. First, we extend the theoretical application of Regulatory Focus Theory to internal communication and identify a novel concurrent application of both prevention- and promotion-focused messages for developing a resilient workforce. Second, we introduce a preliminary conceptualization of an internal crisis communication strategy, emphasizing the concurrent application of prevention- and promotion-focused messages. Lastly, we offer practical suggestions for managing crisis communication strategies.

**Keywords:** Crisis, Cruise, Internal communications, Regulatory Focus Theory, Resilience

## 1. Introduction

The cruise sector was one of the fastest growing sectors in the global tourism industry before the pandemic (Papathanassis, 2017; 2019) generating more than \$150 billion per year (Cruise Lines International Association [CLIA], 2020). Whilst millions of passenger holidays were affected by the pandemic (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020), cruise company employees were also affected with uncertain futures (CLIA, 2020). Marketing managers were called to strategize internal and external marketing communications (Li et al., 2021) to make plans to cope with the ever-changing environment. Extant research has developed knowledge concerning external marketing communications strategies to create and maintain the consumer-brand relationship at a time of crisis (Oltra González et al., 2021). However, this paper adopts a unique examination about how internal communications may curate and maintain a resilient workforce to enable continued trading and success post crisis (Nadeem et al., 2019). Recent studies have suggested that sector resilience is a necessary research stream for future development (Dahles & Susilowati, 2015) but remains in its infancy. Although some work has explored the advantages of resilient employees in improving workplace creativity (De Clercq & Pereira, 2019) and enabling organizations to flourish (Sanhokwe & Takawira, 2022), there is limited understanding about how internal communication can build resilience during a crisis in the tourism industry (Jiang et al., 2019).

To address the dearth of knowledge this study examines cruise marketing practitioners use of internal communication to build workforce resilience at a time of crisis. To do this we adopt Regulatory Focus Theory (Higgins, 1987;1997) as a lens to examine how the two foci of prevention-focused messages and promotion-focused messages influence individuals to achieve their goals and remain resilient. Regulatory Focus Theory explores an individual's

rationale for goal pursuit particularly the individual's desired end-state. Prevention-focused individuals focus on negative results. They are usually concerned with safety and responsibility with a goal to avoid negative outcomes. In contrast, promotion-focused individuals focus on potential positive results of their behavior largely searching for goal advancement (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Higgins, 1997). RTF has been applied in previous studies where prevention-focused messages or promotion-focused messages were used to influence public perceptions of the media's reporting of a crisis and enforce compliance to government messaging (Avnet & Laufer, 2015; Utych, 2020). To the best of our knowledge, RTF has not previously been implemented as a lens to explore how internal communication may enhance resilience during crises in the cruise sector.

This study's contribution is threefold. First, we extend the theoretical application of Regulatory Focus Theory to internal communication and identify a novel concurrent application of both prevention- and promotion-focused messages for developing a resilient workforce. Second, we introduce a preliminary conceptualization of an internal crisis communication strategy, emphasizing the concurrent application of prevention- and promotion-focused messages. Previous studies have opted to consider prevention- and promotion-focused messages individually rather than concurrently (Avnet & Laufer, 2015; Utych, 2020; Wallace et al., 2016). Lastly, we offer practical suggestions that a marketing manager may integrate into an internal crisis communication strategy.

The article is written as follows. **Firstly, it identifies cruise tourism research gaps.** Secondly, it presents a consideration of internal communication and Regulatory Focus Theory. Thirdly, the qualitative research design is discussed and supported with a table of verbatim comments from the participants and the findings are reviewed and discussed. Finally, a conclusion offers a summary, study limitations and suggestions for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Cruise tourism research

The cruise tourism research landscape is vast and includes topics such as customer satisfaction (Ramanathan & Ramanathan, 2016), cruise management (Papathanassis, 2017), destination management (Chen et al., 2019), and sustainability (Jokinen et al., 2022). In particular relevance to this study, cruise employment management has been examined including research on job satisfaction (Radic et al., 2020) and career development (Papathanassis, 2021). Research has identified that current marketing communication frameworks are no longer fit for purpose in today's fast-paced and complex global market (Kalogiannidis, 2021). Literature suggests internal marketing communication should be advanced in areas including staff roles after COVID-19 (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2021), employee reactions in a pandemic (Del Chiappa et al., 2021), and the impact of business communications on employee performance (Kalogiannidis, 2020).

### 2.2 Internal communications

Whilst Bovée and Thill (2000, p. 7) define internal communication as “the exchange of information and ideas within an organization”, Argenti (2003, p. 128), suggests “Internal communication is about creating an atmosphere of respect for all employees”. We adopt Men and Bowen's (2017, p. 12) approach defined as, “managing interdependence and building mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and its employees.” This organizational approach to creating relationships aligns to our study's examination of cruise manager's strategy and use of internal communications in an organization to build resilience.

Studies have shown that effective internal communication can increase trust and engagement (Mishra et al., 2014), build positive relationships (Welch & Jackson, 2012), improve performance and retention (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

[CIPD], 2021), and develop resilience (Kim, 2021). In this regard, internal communications that are appropriately framed can encourage staff to behave positively towards the business and increase the desire to perform well (Nadeem et al., 2019).

Internal communication is a fast-growing topic in communication management. In particular, globalization and crisis management (Vercic et al., 2012) have identified internal communications must be clear, consistent and regular (CIPD, 2022). Thus, effective internal communication can enhance the image of a business by improving employee engagement and enhancing service to external customers (Ewing et al., 2019). Internal communication should focus on topics relevant to ensure employee engagement (Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020) such as, information about organizational issues, personnel (Ewing et al., 2019).

### *2.3 Internal communications in a crisis*

In times of crisis, internal communications enable the sharing of accurate and rapid information during the critical stage of a disaster (Heide & Simonsson, 2021). Internal communications should thus be transparent (Lee et al., 2021), precise (Liu-Lastres et al., 2019) and regularly reviewed (Bojadjev & Vaneva, 2021). During uncertain times employees may suffer stress which can impact on their overall well-being and performance (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). In light of the above examples, crises accentuate the need for effective internal communication. It is critical employees are informed of the fast-paced nature and impact on their work, employment and the business (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022; Lee et al., 2021).

Strandberg and Vigsø (2016) highlight the demands of employees to be well-informed during a crisis. Existing research notes that employers should share messaging with relevant details (Liao, 2017) so that employee expectations about receiving truthful and timely crisis information are met (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015). Companies that communicate effectively with employees in uncertain circumstances can benefit from increased resilience and benefit

from a stronger financial performance (Shin et al., 2012). The emphasis for research about organizational resilience has increased over recent years due to the large number of crises and emergencies (Gabriel-Campos et al., 2021) therefore, this study is timely and of practical use.

#### *2.4 Building employee resilience with internal communications*

Resilience has been defined as a “developable capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, failure, or even positive events, progress, and increased responsibility” (Luthans, 2002, p. 702). It has also been identified as a personality trait that is developed through positively negotiating adversity (Friborg et al., 2009), increasing adaptability and mitigating losses when dealing with traumatic events (Han et al., 2022). Resilience can help enhance proactive learning and growth and develop an optimistic outlook (Cooke et al., 2019) alongside When it comes to human resources management, resilience is essential to build satisfaction among employees (Nadeem et al., 2019). Employee resilience has been defined as “the capacity of employees to utilize resources to continually adapt and flourish at work, even when faced with challenging circumstances” (Kuntz et al., 2016 p. 460). The benefits of resilience include the ability to collaborate with others, learn from colleagues, cope with change more effectively (Franken et al., 2019) and make work more enjoyable (Cope et al., 2016). Research shows that resilient employees can deal with stress and difficult conditions more successfully (Naswall et al., 2019). With an effective internal communication strategy, employee resilience can be enhanced and progressed so that it becomes more sustained and relevant (Hite & McDonald, 2020). Consequently, it would therefore be useful to understand how to construct resilience focused internal communication messages.

To encourage resilience via internal communications it is important that managers are able to communicate effectively as the importance of information flows and knowledge exchange between leaders and their staff has been noted (Bhaskara & Filimonau, 2021).

Managers are advised to positively communicate with employees highlighting the benefits of completing tasks and how this leads to future success (Kakkar, 2018). High-quality communication may reduce the confusion of employees' daily tasks during difficult times (Hu et al., 2021). Sincere communication with employees also maintains an honest image, builds co-operation (Li et al., 2021) and trust (Men et al, 2021). Resilience can be cultivated by managers by framing conversations compellingly (Wallace et al., 2016). If successfully delivered, internal communications offer the workforce the chance to raise concerns and worries making them feel their developing resilience is appreciated (Malik & Garg, 2017).

### *2.5 The tourism and hospitality management context*

The high-turnover of staff in the tourism and hospitality sector (DCMS, 2019) is also of interest to practitioners who have traditionally focused internal communication on staff retention (Frye et al., 2020). This trend adapted during the pandemic as internal communications in the sector were found to be frequent, participatory, open, compassionate and easier to understand, with clear opportunities for employees to engage (Haavisto & Linge, 2022; Paraskevas et al., 2013). In particular, cruise management internal communication literature suggests that during a crisis, communication must be transparent, accurate and timely (Radic et al, 2020a). The tourism industry (including the cruise sector) experienced a greater drubbing from the pandemic due to the complex mix of global regulations, post pandemic debt, and huge job losses (Sigala, 2020; Statista, 2021). However, when the sector started a return to operating, internal communications were redirected to focus on boosting the sector's image and continuing to improve staff retention (Ngoc Su et al. 2021). Previous literature has established that internal communication within the tourism sector benefits staff (Kim, 2021), including sharing information with employees about key priorities (Lee et al., 2021) and feedback about employees' suggestions and work-related



issues (Nart et al., 2019). A post-pandemic stream of literature is, however, calling for contemporary tourism research examining employee resilience to understand how the crisis impacted the sector and stakeholder relationships (Li et al., 2021a). A key priority is research that spotlights how to enhance employee resilience in greater preparedness for potential future crises (Sharma et al., 2021). Our empirical study seeks to address this prime concern using the lens of Regulatory Focus Theory to examine how prevention and promotion - focused internal communications facilitate resilience in staff.

### *2.6 Application of Regulatory Focus Theory*

Regulatory Focus Theory considers an individual's goal pursuit and proposes that individuals can regulate behavior dependent on promotion and prevention-focused messages (Higgins, 1987; 1997). A promotion-focus style refers to achieving an end-state that is related to happiness and pleasure. Promotion-focused individuals are motivated to achieve, accentuate ideals, focus on advancement and set promotion goals (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). Prevention-focused individuals are described as vigilant and careful, who highlight fears, focus on avoiding threats and set prevention goals (Stam et al., 2018). Using work from Higgins (1987; 1997) and Chen and Bei (2017), the differences between the two foci and how they can be described are identified with the following word associations: *prevention messaging* (duty, goal maintenance, non-losses, obeying the rules, ought to do, responsibility, safety and security); *promotion messaging* (accomplishments, advancement, aspirations, gains, goal pursuit, growth, strives towards ideals and hopes).

Regulatory Focus Theory has previously been used to explain how marketing communications can affect an individual's decision making (Petersen et al., 2015), such as, to better understand government communications (Utych, 2021), crisis perceptions (Avnet & Laufer, 2015) and crisis attitudes and responses (Stam et al., 2018). Pertinent to this enquiry,

Regulatory Focus Theory has a prevalence in tourism and hospitality scenarios, including location-based tourism marketing services (Beldona et al., 2022), reaction and coping with travel constraints (Jian et al., 2021), and tourism seasonality (Senbeto & Hon, 2019). It seems reasonable, therefore, that Regulatory Focus Theory will assist in uncovering whether prevention or promotion-focused messages are meaningful for designing a crisis-oriented internal communication strategy. Following previous studies that draw on Regulatory Focus Theory to explore workplace resilience (Kakkar, 2018; Kuntz et al., 2017), the present study adopts this theoretical lens in the context of internal communication to explore how prevention- and promotion-focused messages can be leveraged to build employee resilience within times of uncertainty. While Kakkar (2018) uses this theory to explain leader interactions and Kuntz et al. (2017) focuses on workplace resources (e.g. support and feedback), its application in crisis contexts, and particularly in the cruise industry, is scant. Earlier work has noted that firstly, there is limited research about the impact of crisis ICs on staff (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015; Strandberg & Vigsø, 2016) and secondly, there is a lack of knowledge which considers the impact of ICs on employee resilience (Malik & Garg, 2017). Therefore, the present study aims to enrich this area of study with an examination of Regulatory Focus Theory's prevention and promotion foci to facilitate employee resilience during times of uncertainty. Moreover, the present study also seeks to address an existential gap about the theory. Previous studies have opted to consider prevention- and promotion-focused messages individually rather than concurrently (Avnet & Laufer, 2015; Utych, 2020; Wallace et al., 2016). Yet they offer no clear rationale of why the two message foci cannot be considered together. The categorical treatment of choosing one of the two message foci ignores the synergy they may yield when considered together, especially where other scholars have discussed the utility of holistic communication (cf. Lorenzon & Pilotti, 2008). In summary, our review has identified two gaps in the mentioned literature domains which in

turn serve as the following research questions, and when answered offer theoretical contributions. First, what is the utility of the Regulatory Focus Theory to design an internal communication strategy and promote resilience amongst cruise employees? Second, can prevention- and promotion-focused messages be considered (applied) together to support the communication utility of the Regulatory Focus Theory?

### **3. Research Design**

This research was undertaken during the peak of the pandemic (Autumn 2020) when the UK cruise industry had ceased operations and was facing an uncertain restarting date. The pandemic presented many unusual situations in which employers and staff had little or no experience, such as home-working. Peculiar to the tourism sector were additional uncertainties due to the complex and global nature of the sector (CLIA, 2021). Tourism employees experienced greater job uncertainty as tourism firms went into administration and there was a low return to cruising due to the complex nature of the sector (Du & Karaglou, 2020). In addition, employees were dealing with a complex workload involving managing frustrated customers calling to cancel or rebook whilst balancing mental health pressures due to working from home (Hayhurst, 2020). They in particular needed extra support to cope with the crisis and build resilience as the crisis situation evolved.

A qualitative research design was selected to identify themes and their linkages that shed light on the internal communication approaches used to build employee resilience during a crisis (Santana et al., 2021). Furthermore, qualitative research has proven to be useful during difficult circumstances allowing for actionable and timely data to be collected to inform findings (Vindrola-Padros et al., 2020). Scholars (eg Daye, 2014) champion the utility of qualitative approach to garner deep insight about the effectiveness of crisis

communications (Cohen et al., 2000), and lived experiences (Kirillova, 2018) are important to help understand of resilience building.

### *3.1 Sample and data collection*

The study uses a purposive and referral sampling procedure and 15 semi-structured interviews were undertaken. Participants were marketing practitioners that currently hold or have held staff management roles in the cruise industry. At the time of the interviews two of the participants were furloughed and one participant had recently been made redundant. It was felt they would still be able to offer valid insights because the furloughed participants were still working, but were on reduced hours. The redundant participant had 25 years industry experience and had worked through previous industry crisis, such as SARS.

We define staff management as leading a team of employees and providing them with information and support. Staff managers are responsible for ensuring their teams are motivated and performing at their best (Indeed, 2022). The majority of the practitioners have internal communication experience dealing with previous health epidemics such as SARs and Norovirus which is pertinent to this investigation. Those that met the criteria were invited for an interview; and after each interview, the participant was asked if they could suggest a colleague or contact that might be interested in taking part in the research project. This technique (Parker et al., 2019) continued until 15 practitioners were recruited, also representing the saturation point (see Table I). Guest et al. (2020. p.5) state that “saturation refers to the point during data analysis at which incoming datapoints (interviews) produce little or no new useful information relative to the study objectives.” **It has previously been recommended that qualitative studies require a minimum sample size of at least 12 to reach data saturation (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Picariello et al., 2017)**

The semi-structured interviews lasted approximately an hour and the questions focused on what information was being given to the workforce. The interviews covered what support was being provided to employees including both practical and social messaging.

Table I: Characteristics of participants.

*Insert Table I here*

The participants had accumulated over 400 years of industry experience and expertise and held senior or executive positions (MDs, CEOs, VPs). They represented travel sector companies with the largest market share worldwide (Statista, 2020) including hospitality and aviation and an Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) board member (the UK's leading association of travel agents and tour operators). Between September 2020 to December 2020, researchers undertook 15 semi-structured interviews.

The study does not provide longitudinal data, but explores how cruise practitioners managed resilience-building internal crisis communications at a time of a global pandemic. Participant's comments were selected to support the validity of the findings.

### *3.2 Coding Procedure*

The researchers analyzed the data considering both foci using a sensemaking and sense giving approach suggested by Gioia et al. (2013) see Table II. The researchers analyzed the data considering both foci using a sensemaking and sense giving approach suggested by Gioia et al. (2013) see Table II. This process enables the researchers to understand what is happening at the beginning stages of the data analysis. They are able to track changes which emerge in the relationship between the 1<sup>st</sup> order coding, the 2<sup>nd</sup> order themes and 3<sup>rd</sup> order

aggregated concepts to make sense of the new system of interpretive meaning (Poole et al., 1989). This work illustrates the researcher's primary role is to understand new theoretical implications which are drawn from the new meaning and give sense to the revised conceptualisation.

During the initial phase the researchers coded the data independently. This involved reading and re-reading the interview scripts and diary notes to organize the data into 1st-order themes including personal communications and positive messaging. To help ensure that the findings were legitimate and valid, industry experts from a real-world setting were recruited. In addition, participants' actual words are used and quoted verbatim in the discussion to further enrich the validity of the analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). To improve the reliability of the findings, the researchers followed the inter coder agreement (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989) to endorse the coding scheme and revealed a 95% overlap between the two coders (n =). The coders discussed the remaining 5% of data (n=) and an agreement was reached. Furthermore, to ensure the data analysis was undertaken rigorously, a deliberate decision was made to include a new coder with limited knowledge, "because knowing the literature intimately too early puts blinders on and leads to prior hypothesis bias," (Gioia et al., 2013, p.21).

Table II: Coding of data table with a snapshot of verbatim comments in support.

*Insert Table II here*

Next, the researchers completed a 2<sup>nd</sup> order analysis where the narrative focused on the links between the 1<sup>st</sup> order coding and extant literature about the phenomenon. This stage identified thirteen 2<sup>nd</sup> order themes evolving, see Table II.

The third stage of the coding process provided the researchers with the opportunity to combine the 2<sup>nd</sup> order themes into seven 3<sup>rd</sup> order aggregated concepts, see Table II.

The aggregated concepts form a preliminary conceptualization about internal crisis communication approaches using prevention and promotion foci to create a resilient workforce.

## **4. Findings**

This work considers the research question, to explore the internal communication approach of cruise marketing practitioners during a crisis to build resilience. Using Regulatory Focus Theory's two foci prevention and promotion (Higgins, 1987;1997) serve as the theoretical lens to guide the investigation. The qualitative insights reveal prevention-focused messages were deployed to assuage employees' negative mindsets and emotions such as feeling overwhelmed and frightened. In terms of prevention-focused messages, they were adopted to promote a sense of reassurance offering security and support. Within promotion-focused messaging the insights also reveal a sense of inspiration offering positive messaging looking towards the future.

### *4.1 Prevention-focused*

Findings reveal the internal communication strategy implemented prevention-focused messaging during the initial stage of the crisis. The interests of the employer for the emotional well-being of the employee were evident in the personal messaging and the frequency of up-to-the-minute information sent around the themes listed in Table II. The aim of the internal communications at the outset was to provide employees with regular, personalized messages to reassure them. This included ensuring regular contact was made with staff and conversations with employees were held. Managers contacted their teams regularly to display their care and concern particularly as there was intense media coverage discussing the precarious position of the hospitality and tourism industry. Indeed, updates and briefings were

provided about the challenges and issues within the business as one practitioner said, “there have been lots of dialogue and engagements across all parts of our organization” (P5).

In addition, the prevention-focused communication included well-being advice offering emotional support and providing information on new support services. It was a very uncertain time with employees working from home and cruise operators wanted to ensure that their staff were not isolated and were aware of the additional services that they could access if they were struggling. The human resources departments within the cruise operators were actively involved ensuring that employee comments were included in decision making through staff surveys and proactively contacted employees to assess their needs.

At this time many employees were on furlough and were working from home. Despite this situation, cruise operators remained in contact with employees to ensure they were coping with experiences of isolation and disquiet about the pandemic on their job role. They also provided details of the furlough programme to enable employees to understand the payments and processes.

Those employees who were still working – albeit from home - were also captured within the internal communication strategy. Prevention-focused messages ensured they had the appropriate equipment and by acknowledging the difficulties of working in the different setting the cruise companies communicated their duty of care for staff. When it was time to return to the office, prevention-focused internal communications incorporated information about new protocols, training and how to maintain a safe working environment.

#### *4.2 Promotion-focused*

Findings identified that promotion-focused messaging focused on optimistic messaging and six themes emerged, see Table II. The cruise operators were becoming progressively upbeat about the future prospects of the sector and were preparing for post-



crisis operations. This is reflected in the promotion-focused messaging in the regular meetings that were arranged and the more informal online events. Both enabled employees to share ambitions and discuss their future career prospects with the firm. In addition, findings reveal promotion-focused messaging facilitated employees with an opportunity to become upskilled and advance within the firm, despite the crisis. Employees were offered different work roles or education/training opportunities to enhance their career profiles, such as developing online sales opportunities.

The practitioners also highlighted positive news including business financial security and new ship builds. Moreover, to nurture and encourage individual accomplishments, the promotion-focused messaging was also strategized for the new addition of online social events to develop relationships within employees. Prior investment in new technologies by the organizations improved access to internal colleagues for online meetings at speed as identified by one who participant acknowledged the “virtualness” of the crisis had in fact brought teams closer together, *“It is ironic you sit three foot away from somebody for years and you have no idea what the name of their dog is, but you put them on a computer screen for six months and actually you do tend to find out a lot”* (P12).

Internal communication strategy can therefore be effectively delivered with digital technology when face-to-face contacts are impossible or prohibited (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015; Ruck & Men, 2021; Strandberg & Vigsø, 2016). This serves as an unexpected finding, where several practitioners interviewed were surprised at the utility of digital communication tools like video links to facilitate the dissemination of a message (e.g. positive company news and future business plans) to a wider group of employees, either synchronously or asynchronously. Whilst prevention-focused internal communications were incorporated as the crisis unfolded, latterly promotion-focused messages were the most frequent. As a point of

interest, we uncover a previously undiscovered concurrent phase when both prevention- and promotion- focused messaging are in operation as the crisis ensues, which is a novel outcome.

## 5. Discussion

This work helps to address concerns that current marketing communications frameworks are no longer fit for purpose in today's fast-paced and complex global market (Kalogiannidis, 2021). The qualitative work identifies the relevance of Regulatory Focus Theory's prevention- and promotion-focused messages in designing an internal communication crisis strategy with each message focus playing a different role. That is, prevention-focused messages are relevant to offering support, safety and security to employees, thereby nurturing employee resilience as the firm adapts to the new circumstance in which it is operating (Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2019.) Internal communications can build resilience during a crisis by creating trust (Men et al, 2021) and helping to reduce stress in the workforce (Naswell et al, 2019). Unique from previous work about internal communication and Regulatory Focus Theory's utility to design communications, this study calls for the parallel application of both Regulatory Focus Theory's prevention and promotion-focused in designing an internal communication strategy. Both message foci complement each other. Previous studies have opted to consider prevention- and promotion-focused messages individually rather than concurrently (Avnet & Laufer, 2015; Utych, 2020; Wallace et al., 2016). Whereas this study highlights that at a time of crisis the prevention foci is necessary at initial stages of a crisis, then prevention-promotion foci are used concurrently as the crisis unfolds and as the crisis dissipates the prevention foci is more prominent.

Promotion-focused messages, according to the marketing practitioners of this study, are important to encourage a positive outlook, and a forward-looking mindset amongst

employees instilling enhanced career possibilities as the sector re- opens. Such messages together are necessary to create a sense of optimism, endurance and long-term orientation and in turn help to solidify employees' resilience. This finding resonates with the work of Cooke et al. (2019), who have discussed the importance of an optimistic outlook. Similarly, promotion-focused messages are generally imparted to encourage positive thinking in employees (Kakkar 2018). We extend this process to be successful also at a time of crisis. When a low level of resilience could reasonably be expected, we reveal successful promotion-focused messages (particularly delivered in the later stage of the crisis) inculcate the possibilities of a successful future for staff and the broader cruise sector. In so doing, staff appear to reciprocate the work and energy espoused by the firm in their original nurturing of them at the beginning of the pandemic, rewarding management with a passion and desire to work hard in readiness for the reopening of the sector. This reciprocal relationship, the marketing practitioners of this study consistently emphasize, that would develop a resilient workforce at a time of crisis is particularly novel and moves beyond the established knowledge. A finding echoes the message of previous work (Mishra et al., 2014; Welch & Jackson, 2012).

Whilst this work corroborates previous work about the effective use of internal communication to improve employee performance (Kalogiannidis, 2020) and develop employee resilience (Kim, 2021), when appropriately framed, internal communication can encourage staff to behave positively towards the business and increase the desire to perform well during a crisis (Nadeem, et al., 2019). Reciprocity between management and staff appears to underpin the developing resilient organization as the nurturing prevention-focused messages used at the start of the crisis become more upbeat promotion-focused messages as the crisis begins to dissipate.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Theoretical Contribution

This research makes three contributions to the internal communication and Regulatory Focus Theory literature. First, we extend the relevance of an internal communication strategy to promote employee resilience during a crisis by identifying seven additional crisis communication themes, see Table II.

Second, we identify a novel concurrent application of both prevention- and promotion-focused messages for developing a resilient workforce. That is, we support the co-consideration of prevention- and promotion-focused messages in designing internal communication in order to nurture a resilient workforce at a time of crisis. Both message foci are necessary, as a holistic communication strategy (Lorenzon & Pilotti, 2008) to help cruise employees “develop capacity to bounce back’ from the pandemic (Luthans, 2002, p. 702).

Third, we offer a preliminary conceptualization of the internal crisis communication strategy (Figure 1) which we urge researchers and practitioners to consider in other hospitality-centered settings that align to cruise industries such as hotels, and holiday resorts.

Figure 1: Preliminary conceptualization of the internal crisis communication strategy.

*Insert Figure 1 here*

### 6.2 Practical Implications

This study has two practical implications for cruise practitioners. First, a framework (Figure 1) has been developed to support cruise operators to map and diagnose their resilience-building internal communication strategies in a crisis. Second, our work

informs tourism marketing practices about how to communicate to staff, to build resilience and enable greater preparedness to recover quickly and seize market opportunities post crisis. This framework can be used by cruise practitioners to future plan how they communicate with their employers to improve resilience for greater preparedness to initially message their employers with a prevention-focus. As the communication strategy progresses from prevention focused through to promotion focused messaging, managers could influence resilience by using messaging which is more upbeat such as informing employees about opportunities to upskill, and future business plans. This work suggests that cruise managers should reconsider internal communication strategies to build resilience and identify what needs to be communicated and the most effective delivery approach through investigating current internal communication policies and update using prevention and promotion messaging .

## **7. Limitations and Future Research**

The qualitative insights provided in this study are original and practical but not conclusive, and should be considered with several limitations in mind. First, the study is collected from cruise marketing practitioners and their insights into building employee resilience via an internal communication should be validated with the core target audience. That is, cruise employees. Second, the work based on the UK and its qualitative insights should be tested with other countries that might have reacted to the pandemic's impacts differently. Third, the work is cross-sectional and future research can expand the qualitative research design by considering different time points and other practitioners (eg advertising agencies) working within the cruise industry.

However, despite these limitations the theoretical insights and practical innovations are important to resilience-building internal communication strategies in a crisis and lead to future research areas. Further studies could consider first, internal communication in a broader context and explore different approaches of employee support such as mentoring and coaching to develop resilience and performance (Chang & Chang, 2018). Second, an exploration of the external communication viewpoint to monitor message foci to consumers during a crisis would be useful. Finally, the investigation of the impact of innovative IT in internal communication during crises to help build resilience would be fruitful.

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