Getting Through Tough Times:
Interpersonal Communication Coping Strategies during Job Loss

by

Julie Nolin ©

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

We accept the thesis as conforming to the required standard

_____
Jennifer Walinga, Thesis Faculty Supervisor   Date
School of Communication & Culture
Royal Roads University

_____
Joshua, Guilar, Internal Committee Member   Date
School of Communication & Culture
Royal Roads University

_____
Karl Aquino, External Committee Member   Date
University of British Columbia

_____
Phillip Vannini, Thesis Coordinator   Date
School of Communication & Culture
Royal Roads University

_____
Joshua, Guilar, Director   Date
School of Communication & Culture
Royal Roads University

Abstract

This research paper describes what role interpersonal communication plays in coping with and accepting job loss. The study is framed by theories of stress, appraisal, coping, and the theory of Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO), where aspects of control, inclusion, and affection are achieved through interpersonal communication. Using a combination of surveys and in-depth interviews, two groups of copers were determined: healthy and unhealthy. Then, messages were themed and communication strategies were extracted, to establish what helps a person to thrive or not thrive through a layoff experience. A majority of healthy coping subjects showed solid social support and/or interpersonal communication elements of FIRO-B. Within those categories of FIRO-B, this study shows laid off workers – with purposeful interpersonal communication containing characteristics of affirmation, belonging & acceptance, encouragement, problem solving, trust, elevation, and reverence – are able to focus on opportunities which facilitate their ability to cope effectively with a layoff.

Keywords: job loss, layoff, unemployment, stress, appraisal, acceptance, coping, thriving, support, interpersonal communication, self-efficacy, Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO).

Acknowledgements

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Table of Contents

Getting Through Tough Times:

Interpersonal Communication Coping Strategies during Job Loss

Layoffs are a sign of the times in North America. Companies of all sizes use job cuts as a tool of economic defence when times become difficult, and those times took a turn for the worse when the recession officially began in December 2007. As a result, over 400,000 people lost their jobs in Canada during the last year (Grant, 2009). Not surprisingly, these casualties of job loss experienced distinct stressors, leading to a type of cognitive appraisal process whereby the individual attempted to establish how to react to their new employment status (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Research shows psychological acceptance is a major determinant of mental health and behavioural effectiveness during organizational stress, such as when a worker was ejected from his or her role in the workplace (Appelbaum, Lopes, Audet, Steed, Jacob, Augustinas, & Manolopoulos, 2003; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999). Consequently, this study aimed to uncover the role interpersonal communication plays in coping with and accepting this major life upset, which has affected hundreds of thousands of people across the globe.

Japanese poet and author Kenji Miyazawa once wrote, "We must embrace pain and burn it as fuel for our journey." Research showed us that embracing the pain – in other words, being able to accept a stressful event – could take us to a healthier, more productive place in the aftermath. Hayes et al. (1999) emphasized the key to a constructive journey is completely accepting the experience in order to release oneself from any barriers or obstacles. In this way, "acceptance is not merely tolerance, rather it is the active non-judgemental embracing of experience in the here and now" (Hayes, Strosahl, Wilson, Bisett, Pistorello, & Toarmino, 2004, p. 32), and thus a person could "learn how they can most effectively use the control that they have to promote their mental health" (Bond & Bunce, 2003, p. 1064). Moreover, a successful

transformation could be represented as eustress, termed by Selye (1976) as the 'good' stress experienced by an individual, through constructive feelings and a healthy physical state. By measuring stress appraisal, levels of acceptance, and eustress in the midst of change, the nature of an individual's layoff outcome or how successfully an individual has navigated a job loss can be determined.

For many people, self-efficacy supports resilience through a layoff. Bandura (1982) asserted this sense of self-efficacy or assurance is the individual's conviction or hope that he or she can master a situation or bring about a desired change. However, a person's appraisal was also imperative; using Lazarus and Folkman's (1987) stress, appraisal, and coping framework, a theoretical basis is formed for understanding how individuals coped with job loss, what types of resources facilitate coping, how appraisal of the event affects choices of coping strategies, and which types of strategies help reduce distress. Then, powerful communication strategies can be ascertained.

Once a person's capacity for successfully coping with layoff was determined, the study sought to explore the specific role interpersonal communication plays in the coping process. Schutz (1966) identified that our needs are met by interpersonal relationships and communication through his theory of Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO). Schutz recognized control, inclusion, and affection as the three interpersonal needs for the individual within a network or group. Furthermore, on an organizational level, if the individual reached out to his or her support network in a time of crisis, he or she is more able to thrive amidst crisis. Wellman (1992) asserted the social systems network is a complex structure, yet its components contributed to social support as a whole, whereby the person is delicately influenced by a social organization or network comprised of family, friends, and even former co-workers;

Bandura (1997) also recognized this psychological exercise through his social cognitive theory, where stages of information processing occurred in a social context – and actions were based on this. In essence, communication flowed to and from a social network to help the individual to pass completely through what Hayes (1987) called the psychological actions associated with a disturbance. By acknowledging and moving through these internal events, people efficiently used their thoughts and actions aided by FIRO – previously given over to compliance, escape, or control of these events – to act in ways which matched their personal goals, morals, and ideals (Hayes et al., 1999; Lakey & Canary, 2002). From there, the goal of the study was to examine what interpersonal communication factors facilitate the social support, focal shift, and self-efficacy required for a positive layoff outcome. Research questions have been determined for this study:

- In what ways and what kinds of interpersonal communication help an individual to find acceptance, self-efficacy, and other aspects of a positive psychological response after a layoff?

- Were there specific messages which helped/hindered an individual to cope with and accept a layoff? If so, what are they?

- What specific kinds of communication helped an individual to cope with a layoff?

A mixed method research design incorporated survey and interview research, asking newly laid-off workers to reveal their coping and communication strategies. Surveys isolated levels of acceptance, focal shift, and self-efficacy through the Ways of Coping questionnaire (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985) and Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, & Pinneau's (1975) Social Support Scale; outcomes were deemed positive or negative, through overall indications of eustress or distress perceptions and behaviours. Two groups of participants were identified for

further study: unhealthy and healthy copers. Only then could this research speculate what interpersonal communication strategies and processes facilitate the social support, focal shift, and self efficacy required for a positive layoff outcome.

Using content analysis of verbatim expression (CAVE), healthy coper individuals' communication strategies during a layoff were distinguished (Peterson & Seligman, 1987). Data analysis involved thematic analysis including coding, sorting, and sifting following Grbich's analytical framework (1999) and using Schutz's FIRO-B theory as a theoretical framework for coding. The analysis uncovered themes within the categories of expressed and wanted traits of affection, inclusion, and control – the underlying factors of and motivations for interpersonal communication.

Literature Review

The literature is limited, and no previous studies exist which ascertain the layers of communication required to navigate a layoff scenario. In order to increase our limited understanding of how interpersonal communication specifically plays a role in this major life event, it was imperative to conduct an information search and critical appraisal of issues in psychology and communication: the elements of interpersonal communication that may contribute to a successful layoff outcome, psychological effects of a layoff, and factors which lead to a thriving response despite a layoff. Consequently, sub-topics of communication trust, relational uncertainty, communication competence, mental health, self-integrity, organizational change, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation, and personality/resilience have been isolated. These areas were examined as they are presently regarded in the research literature.

Interpersonal communication

Interpersonal communication is defined as a transactional process between at least two people, ideally face-to-face, where meaning is created: "interpersonal communication is an on-going process rather than an event or a series of events" (Hartley, 1999, p. 26). Interpersonal communication is also shaped by direction (upward, downward, horizontal, and grapevine), channels (a conceptualization of mediums, sometimes determined by where the exchange occurs) into either direct (verbal and non-verbal information – such as facial expressions – directed to the receiver by the sender) along with indirect channels (body language). As well, a communication style is also defined as formal or informal, and can be shaped by a person's communication skills, preferences, and practices – where cultural differences become a part of it. Interpersonal communication involves concepts of trust, relational uncertainty, and communication competence. Interpersonal communication is far more complex than many people realize, because it can be formed over time; what someone says to another person is interpreted on the basis of what messages have been relayed in the past. In the case of a layoff scenario, a receiver may be acutely attuned to both verbal and non-verbal messages received surrounding the layoff event, and deriving additional information from past conversations. Interpersonal communication becomes an essential component of human life because it helps us to meet our basic needs – which can include self-efficacy and self-identity, as mentioned previously. For example, Schutz's (1966) theory of Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO) shows that our communication needs are met by interpersonal relationships, where social support and interpersonal communication can be profound at a time of uncertainty. When our interpersonal communication needs are met, especially amidst a crisis, people can move through distress to a more productive state, called eustress.

Communication and trust. Job loss can undoubtedly affect *trust*. In a study conducted by Tourish, Paulsen, Hobman, and Bordia (2004), a healthcare organization which was undergoing considerable downsizing was examined. By moving away from coping, stress appraisal, and attitudinal outcomes – research focussed on the communication needs for members within an organization. Surveys were administered over a three-year period, allowing researchers to determine that interpersonal communication is needed at a time of downsizing because "faced with uncertainty, people articulate a need for more information" (p. 508). While coping and interpersonal communication needs were different between layoff survivors and victims in this study, the amount of information relayed to both groups was relatively the same. However, trust issues toward superiors were considerable among the layoff group, although this research shows uncertainty in a state of downsizing can be jarring for all involved, and interpersonal communication played a central role.

Communication and relational uncertainty. Messages affect processing abilities, as Knobloch and Solomon (2005) reveal in their study of relational uncertainty and how people process relational information. By looking closely at the conversation of 120 couples, this research proved relational uncertainty affects how people interpret messages, and this vagueness in understanding was then "negatively associated with the extremity of people's judgments about relational messages" (p. 349). Through extracting messages which help a person to make sense of a conversation, researchers uncovered the implications of ambiguity for message processing: "these results complement recent work demonstrating that relational uncertainty makes relating, in general, more difficult" (p. 373). Thus, relational conversations can have a profound effect on self-validation and self-identity through challenging times like job loss, where the unemployed person is looking for answers and support through interpersonal communication.

Competence of communication. Moreover, interpersonal communication involves competence (Hullman, 2004). In Hullman's first study, 139 students were instructed to communicate in pairs, and then surveys were completed about the appropriateness and effectiveness of the conversation. In the second study, 153 students were asked to analyze a conversation scenario, containing three design logics and eight motives. While this research failed to prove that perceived effectiveness and appropriateness – defined as *competence* – is augmented by the application of a more intricate message design, "complex messages might work best for explaining or predicting competence in task relationships that require regulative communication" (p. 221). Thus, in the case of providing support through interpersonal communication, the sender may inherently know the goals of the conversation – but those goals might not be achieved in ritualistic terms, meaning some messages will fail to be competent ones, especially at a stressful time. In a layoff scenario, a layoff victim may have goals or expectations of interpersonal communication. At its core, interpersonal communication helps a person to meet their needs of affection, inclusion, and control. Thus, Hullman's study relates to the way a person meets interpersonal communication needs and goals through specific messages.

Psychological effects of a layoff

In order to comprehend the steps of coping and acceptance, it was essential to examine the emotional reactions of job loss for this study. Research shows individuals are found to experience intense psychological effects due to a layoff's unexpected nature, which tend to be more negative than positive. Therefore, topics of threat appraisal, acceptance levels, coping with psychological effects within an organization, and compromised mental health were essential for examination of this research.

Job loss compromises mental health. Job loss creates a feeling of insecurity, where a person's mental health and identity is challenged. However, dependent on levels of acceptance, the implications of this event either moves a person toward distress or eustress. For instance, psychological distress is a common state following unemployment; Hepworth (1980) found the psychological impact of unemployment – using measures of mental health and subjective well-being – and compared groups of the unemployed, such as age, where a person near retirement age, can cope with a job loss in a healthier way. Overall, unemployed workers had drastically worse mental health and poorer subjective security than the working populace; while not everyone deals with job loss in the same way due to individual proficiencies, "semi-skilled and unskilled men, for whatever reasons, seem the most likely to have an extremely unpleasant experience of unemployment" (p. 145). Mental health strategies are also a focus of research on the unemployed; in another longitudinal study by Caplan, Vinokur, Price, and van Ryn (1989), two groups were created – one provided with coping and problem-solving strategies, and one group was not – researchers' assumptions proved correct that with greater assistance provided to the unemployed, there are higher quality reemployment rates in relation to salaries and job fulfilment. Therefore, interpersonal communication may need to be carefully constructed for the unemployed worker – whose self-integrity and psychological health has been compromised due to job loss.

Job loss and self-integrity. The very *threat* of job cuts can be stressful for workers, because job loss is viewed as hazardous to one's self and identity. In research conducted by Wiesenfeld, Brockner, Petzall, Wolf, and Bailey (2001), researchers formed a hypothesis about self-integrity and the threat of job loss; it was expected that people would react negatively due to job insecurity, and three separate studies – including one longitudinal – were completed where a

layoff, as a moderator variable, was communicated in survey questions. The results show that threats to self-integrity trigger survivors' downbeat perceptions about organizational change through layoffs. However, when subjects engaged in activities which reaffirmed their self-integrity, the effects of a lowered sense of self-integrity was subdued, showing that "there may be numerous ways for layoff survivors to cope with the aspects of layoffs that threaten their self-integrity" (p. 33). Using self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) as a framework, this study shows us that self-identity is a crucial component to determining our place in the world; for instance, self-integrity is a way of looking at one's self as "competent, good, coherent, unitary, stables, capable of free choice, capable of controlling important outcomes, and so on" (p. 262). So, when a person loses their job, this event is viewed as a threat to self-identity; however, interpersonal communication can help to counteract the threat, by relaying messages of a person's constructive contributions to his or her networks, subsequently shaping self-integrity.

Coping with psychological effects within an organization. On a broader level, organizational change created uncertainty in the workforce. In a study by Scheck and Kinicki (2000), an organizational model was tested for what happens when a company is acquired, and members' livelihoods are put into flux. Using Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) cognitive-phenomenological model of coping, Scheck and Kinicki demonstrated that problem-focussed coping was shaped by primary appraisal and negative emotion, while specific types of emotion-focussed coping were directly linked to negative sentiments. All coping approaches were influenced by interpersonal communication, where "social support acts as a resource in directly coping with stressful conditions" (p. 644). So, organizational changes come full circle, and return to how a stressor is communicated to the individual, affecting them on a psychological level.

Therefore, the study affirmed that interpersonal communication can be incorporated and utilized as part of a successful coping process.

Factors which lead to accepting a layoff

Despite the widespread nature of layoffs in recent years, the vast majority of workers are still unprepared when job cuts directly affect them personally. Previous research has shown that stressful events trigger adaptational outcomes, including depression. However, these harmful results can be evaded, when acceptance occurs through interpersonal communication. Therefore, it is necessary to look at ways to reach acceptance, through concepts of appraisal, acceptance and commitment therapy, job control, and resilience.

Stress and coping. Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1987) offers insight into how stressful events were constructed as person-environment connections, where the influence of a stressor or demand is mediated by a person's appraisal of the stressor – and individual and structural perspectives play a role. In Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, and Gruen (1986), an intra-individual approach to their study was taken, allowing researchers to look closely at how subjects coped with five different stressful events: a primary appraisal (what is under threat), along with a secondary appraisal (what are the coping options), eight forms of coping, and then finally, the encounter outcomes. A stressor begins in the human mind as a cognitive appraisal, where "the person evaluates whether a particular encounter with the environment is relevant to his or her well-being, and if so, in what ways" (p. 992). Then in the coping stage, a person decides what they will think and do in a specific stressful encounter, and how this all changes as the incident will develop over time. So in this study, an individual's characteristic approach of appraisal and coping is investigated as they relate to each other, along with how this shapes the stressful event. In this longitudinal study, 75

couples were interviewed over a course of six months; researchers attempted to determine coping

styles of stressful encounters – through the Ways of Coping questionnaire. In summary,

researchers found coping was strongly related to cognitive appraisal – and the coping

mechanisms that were utilized were dependent upon what was under threat and what coping

choices were available. So, although the authors concede this study does not properly evaluate

causal inferences, this research suggests appraisal controls how a person copes with a stressor –

such as reaching out to their support network through interpersonal communication – where

coping influences the end result.

  Acceptance and commitment. As a somewhat newer theory of psychopathology –

acceptance and commitment therapy, or ACT, is a key process as to how individuals can

continue their lives while mindfully releasing the hurdles to acceptance (Hayes et al., 1999).

While human beings are used to suffering, it doesn't mean we are always prepared for a

psychological upheaval, such as a layoff; ACT can free the mind from the hegemony of daily

scripts and even messages regarding behaviours – such as addiction to alcohol or smoking – but

it can also assist with personal histories where memories are unpleasant. A loss of control goes

hand-in-hand with loss of employment, where "change – particularly that involving the visitation

and working through of unpleasant private events – is traumatic" (p. 69). Thus, ACT can teach

an individual to simply take in what is happening through interpersonal communication, and

move toward acceptance.

  Hayes' (1987) theory of psychological acceptance, which tries to clarify mental health

and performance in a framework directly applicable to organizational behaviour, has been useful

in a range of studies. For example, acceptance and job control become determiners of improved

mental health regarding one's livelihood, as shown by Bond and Bunce (2003). In their two-

wave panel study of mental health and work performance, their research established that "people who do not try to avoid or control psychological events have more attentional resources, engage in less avoidant behaviour, and may learn how to they can most effectively use the control that they have to promote their mental health" (p. 1064). In essence, acceptance foretold mental health and an objective measure of performance over and above job control, negative affectivity, and locus of control. Moreover, there was increased job control when workers had higher levels of acceptance. Thus, the coping and acceptance process – aided by interpersonal communication – can lead the laid off person to a better place psychologically, where an individual is inspired to thrive and find resilience.

      Coping, personality, and resilience. Wanberg (1997) looked into the different coping styles employed by diverse personalities in a similar, stressful situation: loss of employment. When certain predictors are present (self-esteem, perceived control, and optimism) with certain outcomes (short-term mental health, reemployment, and long-term mental health), five different coping behaviours evolve out of the differential relationships: proactive search, non-work organization, positive self-assessment, distancing from loss, and job devaluation. While this longitudinal research reiterates that coping styles can be based on personality and disposition, *resilience* is a vital part of coping: "Higher levels of resilience were associated with increased non-work organization (budgeting money and keeping busy) and positive self-assessment" (p. 739). However, the timing of resilient behaviours is imperative; as other research (Leana & Feldman, 1992; Vinokur & Caplan, 1987) has uncovered, job-seeking activity such as a proactive search for work, corresponded to reduced mental health at an earlier time measure in the study. Still, job-seeking activity at one point in time, like how to handle the unemployment situation, was not linked to mental health levels a few months later. Despite the researcher's

expectations, resilience was not associated with increased mental health at a later point in time. In summary, this study shows some confirmation that elevated self-esteem, perceived control, and optimism is coupled with improved mental health during joblessness. Thus, concepts of appraisal, acceptance and commitment therapy, job control, and resilience comprise a basis for determining a successful layoff outcome – making it then possible to determine what interpersonal communication strategies, such as those achieved through social support, contribute to a positive layoff outcome.

Although we know there is a foundation in theories covering the psychological effects of a layoff, factors which lead to a thriving response despite a layoff, and the value of interpersonal communication through this process – there are still unknowns, as to what role interpersonal communication played in coping with and accepting a significant life upset such as a layoff. This study revealed the interpersonal communication factors which facilitate the social support, focal shift, and self-efficacy needed for a positive layoff outcome.

Research Method

The aim of this thesis was to uncover the role interpersonal communication plays in coping with and accepting this major life event of a layoff. Moreover, the research goals are clear: 1) determine the role interpersonal communication plays in coping with and accepting a layoff, and 2) identify the kinds of messages which help an individual to thrive after a layoff; and 3) establish the level of social support which help an individual to cope with and accept a layoff.

Through social media, website postings, and e-mail, a sampling frame of 24 participants was chosen from across North America ($n = 24$). After consent was received, closed-ended questionnaires collected bio and demographical characteristics, years of employment, as well as measures of appraisal, acceptance, ways of coping, self efficacy, and social support. Criterion for

job loss was it had to be recent, occurring between December 2009 and April 2010; this time

frame was essential, due to the need for an accurate recall of events and conversations.

In order to achieve these objectives, this thesis utilized a mixed methods research design

that incorporated both survey and interview research because "when only one approach to

research (quantitative or qualitative) is inadequate by itself to address the research problem,

mixed methods research is the preferred design" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 32). By first

assessing the coping styles, social support, and self-efficacy of each subject, it was possible to

determine layoff coping outcome (healthy or unhealthy) and group the participants accordingly.

Twenty-four subjects were then asked to reflect on their own layoff experiences; interviews were

an opportunity to reveal more about messages and support strategies. By coding, sorting, and

theming interview transcriptions, it was possible to extract the interpersonal communication

habits of each participant and identify what interpersonal communication strategies corresponded

with healthy coping after job loss.

Participants

There were 10 male and 14 female participants, ranging in age from 21 to 61-years-old;

the modal age score was 40 and the median age was 41. Additionally, subjects identified the

following years of their adult life as forming their career or livelihood:

- 2 as 0-5 years

- 4 as 5-10 years

- 6 as 10-20 years

- 10 as 20-30 years

- 2 as over 30 years

Thus, the majority of respondents considered their careers to be within the range of 20-30 years. Participants were not asked for specific occupations or fields, although some readily offered this information anyway. This showed layoffs in diverse sectors of the working population: speech pathologist, receptionist, legal assistant, executive assistant, human resources professional, plant manager, project manager, engineer, sales associate, visual effects designer, television director, and photojournalist.

Measures

Surveys

The intention of this study was to "achieve a balance between open questioning to explore issues, and obtaining responses which can subsequently be easily examined and compared" (Walliman, 2005, p. 285). Thus, measures from surveys were used to establish groups of either psychologically successful layoff or unsuccessful layoff outcomes, healthy and unhealthy copers. This was done by measuring cognitive and behavioural elements of ways of coping, appraisal, and acceptance. Questionnaires were administered by e-mail, and returned by fax or e-mail upon completion. Participants were later interviewed to explore what interpersonal communication strategies lead to a productive or unproductive outcome. As an orientational framework, Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1987) was used for distinctions of appraisal and coping. Outcome measures were comprised of two scales for coping with a layoff, one for *problem-solving coping* and one for *emotion-focussed coping*. Moreover, this same model was utilized to detect outcomes of eustress and distress: Through specific questions in the survey, it was determined whether a participant was experiencing eustress, the thriving component which propels a person to be productive through a layoff scenario, or distress, which hinders a person, and is deemed unproductive. The Ways of Coping

questionnaire (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985) was used to capture coping strategies and was also used to determine a person's interpretation of the challenges posed by a layoff. Problem-focussed strategies were aimed at how to proceed within a situation where the individual seeks to change the environment ('I'm making a plan of action and following it'), or positive reappraisal (I'm growing as a person), whereas emotion-focussed strategies were about reducing the emotional suffering surrounding the layoff, such as escape-avoidance ('I slept more than usual'). Responses ranged from used a great deal (3) to does not apply/not used (0) based on a 4-point Likert scale.

As well, the Ways of Coping (WOC) questionnaire was employed to measure acceptance levels, where acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) was used as a theoretical framework. For example, if an individual was wishing to avoid the layoff while enduring a layoff, detected in the *escape-avoidance* section of the questionnaire, then this indicated a lack of acceptance ('wished that the situation would go away or somehow would be over with'). Alternatively, a healthy coping choice – toward acceptance – was indicated on the questionnaire under the category of *positive reappraisal* ('changed or grew as a person').

However, a positive outcome is also captured with self-efficacy; this was measured through Jerusalem & Schwarzer's (1993) General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE), where an individual's general perception of self-efficacy was assessed, with the goal of predicting coping strategies through a stressful life event such as a layoff. Studies have previously shown a connection between positive coefficients and favorable emotions, dispositional optimism, and life satisfaction – where negative coefficients are found to correlate with depression, anxiety, stress, burnout, and health complaints; ten items were added to a larger pool of items on the WOC questionnaire using the same response format. Then, social support was a final measure; by using Caplan et al.'s (1975) Social Support Scale (SSS), the extent to which certain sources of

support was detected (i.e., spouse, friends, former co-workers, and relatives) providing types of support following a layoff.

Survey questions included 66 items from the Ways of Coping Questionnaire, ten questions from the General Self-Efficacy Questionnaire, and four questions from the Social Support Scale – for a total of 80 Likert-scale questions, where the last scale was modified to reflect job loss, rather than a stable employment situation:

- Went on as if nothing had happened.

- Talked to someone who could do something concrete about the problem.

- I got professional help.

- I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.

- How much does each of these people go out of their way to do things to make your work life/job loss easier for you: former boss, other people from work, family and friends, etc.?

These series of questions were necessary to assess the coping decisions through the specific life event: the layoff. The outcome measure gauged how the individual interpreted the stress of job loss, which was then categorized as distress or eustress. Eustress was first outlined by Hans Selye (1956), the well-known stress psychologist and researcher, who explained what humans experience following a challenge or stressor, how individuals process the stressor – in the form of a layoff – revealed whether it was interpreted it as eustress (positively) or distress (negatively) leading to two groups of participants: healthy and unhealthy copers. From there it was possible to extract the specific elements of interpersonal communication, which aid in healthy coping strategies through a layoff circumstance.

Interviews

Following the submission of initial surveys, 24 in-depth interviews were conducted and recorded, which allowed subjects to elaborate on the central meanings and themes surrounding their layoff, further uncovering the 'hows' and 'whys' of interpersonal communication messages and strategies for coping with layoffs (Kvale, 1996). This was accomplished through the use of probing, specifying, and direct questions in a conversation kind of interview; because surveys set the stage for content, these types of questions led to an explanation of the subjects' perceptions. Hence, questions unearthed the communication processes at work: How did communication with family and friends help to find support and self-efficacy during a job layoff? How did these conversations help form new self-concepts during this loss? What messages created the most *meaning* during a layoff? Follow-up interviews cross-validated findings, by forming a clearer picture as to how subjects interpret the interpersonal communication processes at work, through eight interview questions:

- Can you describe the kinds of verbal support you received from others following your layoff?

- If your layoff caused you to experience stress, how did talking to people about your job loss help you?

- Describe a pivotal conversation with your former employer after your layoff.

- Describe a pivotal conversation with your partner/spouse or family after your layoff.

- Describe a pivotal conversation with a friend or former co-worker after your layoff.

- What kinds of messages, if any, did you hear from people around you which helped – and why?

- What kinds of messages, if any, did you hear from people around you which did not help – and why?

- What new things, if any, did you discover about yourself through conversations with your family, friends, former co-workers, and former supervisor?

Method of Data Analysis

Relative scores on surveys were determined using scoring methods that accompany each of the surveys – and participants were grouped according to the distress/eustress categories. The data from the interviews was transcribed and coded, then examined for themes related to interpersonal communication. Content analysis of verbatim expression (CAVE) was undertaken to analyze the data: Thematic analysis, or pattern coding, assembled various segments of data into smaller analytic groupings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Initial categories were based on the FIRO theoretical framework; the FIRO-B scale, developed by Schutz (1966), was used to code and sort data, based on categories of inclusion, affection, and control – specifically 'expressed' and 'wanted' components of each grouping:

- Inclusion (wanted): significance, contact, and involvement; determining how much the subject wants to include others in their activities, and/or seeking recognition

- Inclusion (expressed): determining how much the subject talks and jokes with others and/or initiating contact with others

- Affection (wanted): warmth and self-disclosure; being flexible and/or listening to others

- Affection (expressed): reassuring and supporting others, and/or coaching and developing others

- Control (wanted): competence, influence, and authority; requesting clarification and/or wanting direction and guidance

- Control (expressed): directing people and/or accepting responsibility

From there, themes were derived from within each category relating to what interpersonal communication strategies, including message or content, style, channel, and direction of the communication, support a healthy (eustress) psychological outcome following a layoff. Theming of the data was conducted manually using scissors and piles.

Results

Findings revealed the links between measures of healthy coping and key interpersonal communication techniques. Results show how layoff victims connected with numerous members of a support network, in order to chronicle specific content, within a range of interpersonal communication directions, channels, and styles.

Surveys

As shown in Table 1, the number of healthy copers (powered by *eustress*) was determined to be 14 out of the 24 study participants, because they predominantly demonstrated coping styles such as planful problem solving coping strategies and/or seeking social support. Three participants showed some inclinations of distancing, but all showed either planful problem solving or positive reappraisal, or a combination of the two coping styles, showing cognitive appraisal leading to acceptance of their layoff. Additionally, 13 out of 14 of the healthy copers scored relatively high (at least 20/30 points) on the General Self Efficacy Scale.

Table 1 – Healthy coping

Subject	Ways of Coping	GSE	SSS
4	Positive reappraisal/planful problem solving	20/30	21/48

5	Positive reappraisal/planful problem solving	15/30	30/48
8	Positive reappraisal/distancing	28/30	22/48
10	Positive reappraisal/planful problem solving	20/30	42/48
12	Positive reappraisal/planful problem solving	30/30	32/48
13	Positive reappraisal/planful problem solving	27/30	34/48
15	Positive reappraisal/seeking social support	23/30	32/48
16	Positive reappraisal/planful problem solving	28/30	36/48
17	Self-control/planful problem solving	29/30	32/48
19	Positive reappraisal/planful problem solving	23/30	33/48
20	Planful problem solving/seeking social support	23/30	30/48
21	Planful problem solving/seeking social support	28/30	27/30
22	Planful problem solving	28/30	45/48
23	Self-controlling/planful problem solving	29/30	29/48

As shown in Table 2, unhealthy copers (hampered by *distress*) were reasoned to be the remaining 10 participants, as they exhibited coping approaches such as escape-avoidance and/or distancing. Because they did not show reasonable scores for planful problem solving and/or positive reappraisal, I believe this shows a lack of appraisal and acceptance surround their respective layoffs. They also showed lower scores on the General Self Efficacy Scale, with four of the ten scoring below 20/30.

Table 2 – Unhealthy coping

Subject	Ways of Coping	GSE	SSS
1	Escape-avoidance	27/30	31/48
2	Escape-avoidance	20/30	35/48
3	Seeking social support/self-controlling	19/30	32/48
6	Escape-avoidance/self-controlling	22/30	32/48
7	Seeking social support/self-controlling	24/30	33/48
9	Self-controlling/escape-avoidance	18/30	25/48
11	Escape-avoidance/self-controlling	19/30	31/48
14	Self-controlling/seeking social support	22/30	26/48

18	Self-controlling	21/30	33/48
24	Seeking social support/escape-avoidance	14/30	37/48

Interviews

The function of the phone interviews was to reveal the precise interpersonal communication strategies and processes surrounding a layoff outcome. Participants employed a wide range of interpersonal communication approaches during and after their respective layoffs, and straightforwardly identified the sources, nature, and amount of support.

By looking closely at the *content* of the interpersonal communication received by healthy copers, I can derive four major themes within the messages: affirmation (the layoff victim is still a good person and/or has noteworthy attributes), belonging & acceptance (recognition of the gap left by the departure of the laid off employee), encouragement (things will work out), and problem solving (here's a way to help you find employment, for instance) – as shown in Table 3. By hearing messages containing these themes, I argue this kind of quality interpersonal communication boosted appraisal, acceptance, eustress, and healthy, problem-focussed coping within the minds of members of healthy copers.

Table 3 – Content of interpersonal communication

FIRO-B	Message/content	Emergent theme
Inclusion	"I belong to a woman's prayer group and they knew of my personal situation. The fact that they actually prayed for me is very comforting."	Belonging & acceptance
	"The day they had announced that I had lost my job, she said we almost had a full building rebellion."	Belonging & acceptance
	"They're saying we miss you and we want you to come back."	Belonging & acceptance
	"Having support from other friends who are also unemployed is quite valuable. We continue to urge each other on and think positively and	Encouragement;

	we're helping each other find jobs."	problem solving
	"The fun elements were apparently me. Those are gone, and now people are afraid. It was pivotal for me, because I had no idea that I was that for them. They said the personality of the office was me."	Affirmation; acceptance & Belonging
Affection	"No one tells you while you're there if you're good or bad. It was good that they took the time to call."	Affirmation
	"Sorry to see you go, or you were the last we ever expected for this to happen to."	Belonging & Acceptance
	"It was reassuring, because she understood my feelings and what I wanted to do with this new beginning."	Affirmation; Encouragement
	"Verbal support as far as 'you'll find a new job, you'll land on your feet' – all that kind of good stuff."	Encouragement
	"A conversation between myself and two of my former staff. One of them was devastated with my position being eliminated. She wrote in my card, 'I am nothing without you.'"	Belonging & acceptance; affirmation
	"Most of the people who worked under me, had something to say... very positive about my management skills and my personality and just how I conduct business."	Belonging & acceptance; Affirmation
	"Verification, or like a 'you are a good person, it's meant to be, a chance to do something you really want to do' – those types of encouragement to get me through it."	Encouragement; affirmation
Control	"Encouraging words about the future, and you'll find a better fit and life balance."	Encouragement
	"They would get me out of that mood, and swing it around and show me all the positive things as to why it is positive and not a stressful thing."	Encouragement; problem solving
	"A written recommendation from her as well I know why I was laid off was not personal; it was business, which made it seem that much better."	Affirmation
	"Truthfully, by losing the job and having the verbal support of pretty much everyone at [name removed], and my family and friends, that I regained the confidence."	Encouragement; affirmation
	"I really didn't tell anybody. My parents thought it was a good thing that it happened because I wasn't happy at my job."	Affirmation; encouragement

When it comes to the *direction* of interpersonal communication for participants in this study, as demonstrated in Table 4, messages came from all routes possible relayed from the perspective of the participant: downward (such as former subordinates or even children), horizontal (spouse, friends, and former co-workers), upward (former supervisors), and grapevine (all directions, especially within the network of the former place of employment). I have extracted three themes within the direction of these messages, depicting the nature of the direction and quality the direction communicated: trust (where former colleagues relate to each other and provide comfort during a time of vulnerability), elevating (such as a former boss, providing support which is meant to *lift* the layoff victim from a now absence of status), and reverence (especially former subordinates, who still express respect through affection, and keep the participant at a high stature and also *lift*, even though the laid off worker's position has been eradicated from the workplace.

Table 4 – Direction of interpersonal communication

FIRO-B	Direction	Example	Emergent theme
Inclusion	Horizontal	"I belong to a woman's prayer group…"	Trust
	Upward	"She said we almost had a full building rebellion."	Elevating
	Horizontal	"They're saying we miss you…"	Trust
	Horizontal	"Having support from other friends who are also unemployed is quite valuable…"	Trust
	Horizontal; downward	"The fun elements were apparently me."	Trust
Affection	Horizontal; downward	"It was good that they took the time to call."	Reverence
	Horizontal	"Sorry to see you go…"	Trust
	Downward	"She understood my feelings…"	Reverence
	Horizontal	"Verbal support as far as 'you'll find a new job, you'll land on your feet'…"	Trust

	Downward	"She wrote in my card, 'I am nothing without you.'"	Reverence
	Downward	"Most of the people who worked under me, had something to say... very positive…"	Reverence
	Horizontal	"Verification, or like a 'you are a good person…"	Trust
Control	Horizontal; downward	"Encouraging words about the future…"	Trust; reverence
	Horizontal	"They would get me out of that mood…"	Trust
	Downward	"A written recommendation from her…"	Elevating
	Downward; upward; horizontal; grapevine	"Having the verbal support of pretty much everyone…"	Elevating; trust; reverence
	Downward	"My parents thought it was a good thing…"	Elevating

The *channels* of interpersonal communication also shows interesting data, as outlined in

Table 5. Communication for the purpose of support following a layoff took place in three places:

home (either because family is there or members of the support network would call or e-mail the

participant at their house, as where else would they be), a public place (coffee shop, restaurant,

and church), and even the former workplace, although this was sometimes described by laid off

workers as a riskier setting for empathetic and meaningful conversation. Therefore, three themes,

as revealed in Table 5, are determined from the concept of *channel* of interpersonal

communication for the participant following a layoff: sanctuary (home), neutral ground (public

place), and former domain (workplace).

Table 5 – Channel of interpersonal communication

FIRO-B	Channel	Example	Emergent theme
Inclusion	Public place (church)	"I belong to a woman's prayer group…"	Neutral ground
	Home by phone	"She said we almost had a full building rebellion."	Sanctuary
	Home by phone	"They're saying we miss you..."	Sanctuary
	Public place; friend's	"Having support from other friends who are also	Neutral ground;

	home	unemployed is quite valuable…"	sanctuary
	Public place	"The fun elements were apparently me."	Neutral ground
Affection	Home by phone	"It was good that they took the time to call."	Sanctuary
	Workplace	"Sorry to see you go…"	Former domain
	Home	"She understood my feelings…"	Sanctuary
	Home by phone	"Verbal support as far as 'you'll find a new job, you'll land on your feet'…"	Sanctuary
	Public place	"She wrote in my card, 'I am nothing without you.'"	Neutral ground
	Workplace	"Most of the people who worked under me, had something to say... very positive…"	Former domain
	Public place	"Verification, or like a 'you are a good person…"	Neutral ground
Control	Public place	"Encouraging words about the future…"	Neutral ground
	Public place (coffee shop)	"They would get me out of that mood…"	Neutral ground
	Workplace	"A written recommendation from her…"	Former domain
	Public place	"Having the verbal support of pretty much everyone…"	Neutral ground
	Home	"My parents thought it was a good thing…"	Sanctuary

Finally, participants took part in a *style* of communication, defined as either formal or informal – and at times in a group setting. Within these styles of interpersonal communication, two themes emerged: reticent (more reserved expressions of interpersonal communication) and purposeful (focussed messages on relating to the situation of the unemployed worker).

Table 6 – Style of interpersonal communication

FIRO-B	Style	Example	Emergent theme
Inclusion	Group; formal	"I belong to a woman's prayer group…"	Reticent; purposeful
	Informal	"She said we almost had a full building rebellion."	Purposeful
	Informal	"They're saying we miss you..."	Purposeful

	Informal	"Having support from other friends who are also unemployed is quite valuable…"	Purposeful
	Informal	"The fun elements were apparently me."	Purposeful
Affection	Informal	"It was good that they took the time to call."	Purposeful
	Informal	"Sorry to see you go…"	Purposeful
	Informal	"She understood my feelings…"	Purposeful
	Informal	"Verbal support as far as 'you'll find a new job, you'll land on your feet'…"	Purposeful
	Group; informal	"She wrote in my card, 'I am nothing without you.'"	Purposeful
	Group; informal	"Most of the people who worked under me, had something to say… very positive…"	Purposeful
	Informal	"Verification, or like a 'you are a good person…"	Purposeful
Control	Informal	"Encouraging words about the future…"	Purposeful
	Informal	"They would get me out of that mood…"	Purposeful
	Formal	"A written recommendation from her…"	Reticent
	Informal	"Having the verbal support of pretty much everyone…"	Purposeful
	Informal	"My parents thought it was a good thing…"	Purposeful

Social support: How does interpersonal communication with family and friends help an individual to find acceptance, self-efficacy, and other aspects of a positive psychological response after a layoff?

To begin with, this study verifies that social support is essential to coping with job loss. In the case of every respondent, there were copious messages of support conveyed to job loss victims – especially from a spouse (where applicable), friends, former co-workers, and relatives – because interpersonal communication can open up a person to acceptance and self-efficacy following job loss. Plus, the conditions of eustress boost the layoff victim into a mindset of

planful problem solving when helpful, solutions-oriented messages are relayed by members of a

support network. Lastly, the emotional needs of a person are heightened after a layoff, so

interpersonal communication containing inclusion, affection, and control is gratifying when it

comes from as many members of a support network as possible. Therefore, the *direction* of these

messages can matter greatly.

Trust. The majority of participants in this study, both healthy and unhealthy copers,

looked to members of their support network for interpersonal communication in a direction

defined as horizontal: Family, friends, and former co-workers are on equal footing with the laid

off worker. These relationships were then defined by *trust*:

- "I think what was important that people... that I had a chance to tell other people how I

  was feeling, or how it makes me feel when the decision was made."

- "I got a lot of support from my colleagues… a lot of people were very caught off guard

  and came up to me and talked to me a little bit, which was just nice to know."

- "It's good to have that support of 'you're not alone.' We're in this together and let's try to

  help each other through this mess."

Therefore through trust, participants relied heavily on contemporaries for comfort in their

interpersonal communication approaches.

Reverence. Former subordinates also participated in interpersonal communication

strategies with healthy copers, centred mostly around *reverence*, where the goal of messages was

to maintain respect. However, with some participants in management roles, subordinates were

left without a leader which created panic for them, then relayed to the laid off worker ("I found

that talking to people actually made my stress worse. Because everyone's got that, 'Oh no, oh my

God, what are you going to do'"). Although for many healthy copers in supervisory positions

this was not the case, and it was reassuring to hear reverence:

- "Some of them put me down as a reference and stuff like that so it's really helpful when
  you hear that."

- "It was respect. Certainly someone they could talk to if necessary and that who would
  listen to them, or that they could talk to about their issues or concerns or problems. I
  guess from an interpersonal respect that was somewhat gratifying."

- "We talked about how she felt like nothing, and she had no one to lean on."

In essence, healthy copers had played a key role in their former workplaces, and likely exhibited

strong interpersonal communication skills before their respective departures. So, it was crucial

for their former staff members, also clearly support, to revere the qualities and traits of the laid

off subject – which in turn aided appraisal, acceptance, and self-efficacy.

Elevation. Another direction of interpersonal communication came from an upward

source of support in a healthy coper's network. Through a subject's supervisor or parent, these

messages are defined as *elevating*, meant to prop up the stature of a subject, who may have found

themselves unsure of a self-identity through a layoff:

- "I was told that if I needed anything whether it was a reference on my resume or anything
  like that, you know feel free to give him a call."

- "The individual who's in charge of HR in the [city removed] office had indicated that if I
  had quit, she would have done everything in her power to discourage me from doing so,
  because she knew a package was in the works for some time."

- "My parents said whatever decision was mine to make, they said whatever decision I made they would support me in that, if I wanted to work, or I wanted to keep working that was my choice, too."

Basically, when layoff victims partook in interpersonal communication through their social support network containing directional themes of trust, reverence, and elevation – participants were able to move through the stressful event into a place of appraisal, acceptance, high self-efficacy, and healthy coping.

Exact content: Were there specific messages which helped or hindered an individual to cope with and accept a layoff? If so, what are they?

Going through a loss of employment can be traumatic, but a layoff in particular can be described as even more distressing, because of the lack of mental preparation for it. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress results when an individual evaluates an incident as 'wearing' or beyond available resources and jeopardizing well-being. Therefore, appraisal becomes a key factor in dealing with job loss. For instance, Leana and Feldman (1992) described three types of appraisal when assessing the loss of employment: 1) the concentration of the experience such as threat, discomfort, and disruption; 2) the causality of the incident, as in the degree the job loss occurred due to external factors opposed to being self-inflicted; and 3) the ability to turn around the event, such as reemployment opportunities. As a result, interpersonal communication becomes a way for people to bridge the gap between discomfort and positive layoff outcomes.

When it comes to appraisal, it was important for participants to be able to identify the event as a threat or non-threat. Once this was defined cognitively, the subject could choose to focus on the anxiety surrounding job loss – or instead, move onto solutions to the situation. Often times, strategies within the FIRO-B framework could provide *encouragement, acceptance and*

belonging, affirmation, and *problem solving* – leading to an appraisal that the layoff was not a threat. Concisely, messages relayed to the laid off worker – in terms of *content* – can make a difference in healthy coping strategies.

Affirmation. A key finding is that healthy copers participated in interpersonal communication strategies where they were open to hearing *affirmation* about their abilities. Simply hearing that a layoff was strictly business and nothing personal was not always desirable. Instead, when messages affirmed the participants' contributions to his/her former workplace, or when family members confirmed the traits of the laid off worker, participants expressed these messages were gratifying:

- "You're a hard worker, and you were successful once before, so just keep trying."

- "I have some marketable skills that they can take me in a different direction that I have used for the last few years. That really helped a lot to be able to hear that."

- "Hearing and believing this is the right career for me, that I don't necessarily need a new career, I just need a new place to do my career."

- "In the early stages in the first few weeks, they said, '[name removed], you're better off. Your potential was never realized, no one really understood you in that organization. You were never really to do what you were supposed to do.'"

So, when interpersonal communication contained affirmations and verifications of a healthy coper's talents, abilities, and skills – this lead to higher self-efficacy and thus helped the laid off worker to appraise and move through the layoff scenario, finding acceptance.

Encouragement. Hearing words of *encouragement* through interpersonal communication can help to facilitate acceptance, bringing an individual to a place where they can exercise mental flexibility – and job loss is a situation which is prime for this kind of psychological

workout. Encouragement is fuel for healthy coping, where a layoff victim may feel worn down by the event. This is when encouragement can help to transport a person from stress to eustress:

- "Lots of people are saying, you'll see in six months, you'll think this was the best thing that ever happened to you."

- "Encouraging words about the future, and you'll find a better fit and life balance."

- "Talking to others really helped because they make you realize the big picture and how this is just a little bump in the road, and that life goes on, no matter what."

Although interpersonal communication without substance does not seem to resonate with a worker recovering from a layoff:

- "I really don't find the 'it will be okay' [message] to be very helpful, because I feel like, how do you know it will be okay? How do you know I will find work?"

As a result, when participants hear specific messages of encouragement via interpersonal communication which aid in healthy coping strategies, they are powered by eustress to find a focal shift toward acceptance and a positive layoff outcome.

Acceptance and belonging. Interpersonal communication containing a theme of *acceptance and belonging* guided the laid off worker into healthy coping. A majority of these messages came from contemporaries, left behind at the workplace due to the subject's departure. This is a significant notion that acceptance and belonging needs to be communicated, because if the laid off worker had enjoyed their job and therefore missed their position and the people around them, it was unpleasant if these feelings were not reciprocated by co-workers. Additionally, it was crucial for participants to hear messages of acceptance and belonging from members of their own families. Healthy copers did, in fact, hear interpersonal communication containing acceptance and belonging:

- "Both of my workers I work with directly here in [city removed], one of them who is my mentor, gave me a really big hug and said it was going to be okay."

- "Two or three messages a week from either of them saying, work sucks. We miss you, kind of stuff, which was nice."

- "I still talk to a couple of people I used to work with there. They have been supportive. I mean, to saying it's not the same without you."

Alternatively, interpersonal communication containing acceptance and belonging could have a negative effect, although this healthy coper took it in stride:

- "The corporation would be so much better if you came back. I'm like, I didn't choose to leave here, folks. I think it was a backward compliment where they're saying we miss you and we want you to come back, but it was so pitiful."

Hence, when laid off workers feel acceptance and belonging via interpersonal communication from former co-workers in particular, they could move freely through appraisal and acceptance, into a territory of healthy coping.

Problem solving. While encouragement, acceptance and belonging, and encouragement were helpful messages – members of a support network who also provided messages containing *problem solving* unquestionably aided participants in healthy coping tactics. This kind of interpersonal communication helped layoff victims to clarify their ideals and move into action:

- "You know, there were people that I talked to, were all, 'Well, if I hear of anything I will think of you, and if I know of anybody, or why don't you talk to so-and-so over at this company,' and that sort of thing, it was very much the ability to find opportunity elsewhere when you started talking about it with other people."

- "Having support from other friends who are also unemployed is quite valuable. We continue to urge each other on and think positively and we're helping each other find jobs."

- "My friend in HR helped me along with prepping myself, even though she's not responsible for getting me a job, the fact that she's saying "we.""

Thus, by narrowing down interpersonal communication needs from affection, inclusion, and control into a theme of problem solving for example, healthy copers ultimately become planful problem solvers – which this study shows is 11 out of 14 of the healthy copers. In addition to this theme, interpersonal communication comprised of encouragement, acceptance and belonging, and affirmation powered healthy copers into a place of eustress – where appraisal, acceptance, and strong self-efficacy resided.

Channel and style: What specific kinds of communication helped an individual to cope with a layoff?

Support from various sources, and as many as possible, appears to be key among healthy copers of job loss. However, the *channel* and *style* of messages were also imperative, as the laid off worker relied on interpersonal communication strategies to survive the layoff; this included purposeful or reticent communication, relayed to healthy copers at their sanctuary, neutral ground, or former domain.

  Purposeful and/or reticent messages. Messages that were *purposeful* – containing empathy and concern – facilitated healthy coping for participants. This style of message was usually conveyed in a personal, face-to-face approach. However, *reticent* messages were typically communicated in a group setting, such as a gathering held in honour of the laid off worker. This interpersonal communication was not as intimate, and at times more conservative in

nature, but messages were well-received because they still had purpose in aiding self-identity. In tandem, these formal or informal messages were highly valued by all participants of this study.

Sanctuary, neutral ground, and former domain. Because most participants were out of work for an extended period, most were reached at home, or *sanctuary*. It was a safe place for all of the laid off workers, and many times they had nowhere else to turn. This is where participants received phone calls and e-mails from former co-workers and extended family. However, if subjects were open to reconnecting with former colleagues, the bulk of these meetings took place in coffee shops, restaurants, or other public places called *neutral ground*, where the laid off worker and his/her support network were free to use purposeful conversation – including messages of affirmation, belonging & acceptance, encouragement, and problem solving – outside of the workplace. Still, interpersonal communication did happen within the walls of the former employer, called the former domain, at any point in time from the layoff. These conversations tended to be more reticent or reserved, although some messages were more purposeful in nature; at times, it was because an employer explained the nature of the layoff ('based on business and seniority') or even to establish work opportunities for the future ('him using my skills in a sub-contract manner'). In essence, interpersonal communication exhibiting style and channel themes which are more purposeful than reticent, along with being delivered on neutral ground or at a laid off worker's sanctuary – seem to be stronger, well-received messages, leading to healthy coping involving appraisal, acceptance, and high levels of self-efficacy which comprise a positive psychological response.

Discussion

Job loss is one of the most stressful events in a person's life, and previous studies establish this (Tourish et al., 2004; Hepworth, 1980; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). However, so little

is known about the role of specific interpersonal communication through coping with a layoff. Nonetheless, this research shows when interpersonal communication from the laid off worker's support network is purposeful – containing messages of encouragement, acceptance and belonging, affirmation, problem solving, trust, reverence, and elevation – then the conditions of eustress are ideal. This eustress then drives the laid off worker into appraisal, acceptance, and planful problem solving – where healthy copers can re-fuel for additional, purposeful interpersonal communication to keep them on-track. As such, this study informed the literature about how interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in coping with this stressful, personal and organizational situation; the research questions guiding the study investigated principles of interpersonal communication: a) How does interpersonal communication with family and friends help an individual to find acceptance, self-efficacy, and other aspects of a positive psychological response after a layoff? b) Were there specific messages which helped/hindered an individual to cope with and accept a layoff? If so, what are they? c) What specific kinds of communication helped an individual to cope with a layoff?

Previous research by Hayes et al. (1999) into acceptance and commitment therapy illustrates language helps individuals to put meaning into their world. This current study confirms how instrumental interpersonal communication can be in dealing with sudden unemployment, as healthy copers exhibited a strong approach in their own interpersonal communication. However, as Hayes et al. (p. 183) demonstrate in the passage below, some messages received through interpersonal communication can also hamper a person's capacity to achieve a focal shift – and then to truly become planful problem solvers about their unemployment situation:

At a university several years ago, an animal activist freed a few dozen pigeons used in animal operant research. Although fully able to fly, the birds sat forlornly next to the front door until caretakers arrived the next morning. Clients who are attached to their conceptualized selves are like that – even experiences that might open the client up are reinterpreted with the use of existing verbal schemes and promptly reintegrated into the original conceptual prison. To escape a prison, it is necessary to see the prison itself.

People hear messages from society that, from the time they are children, they must find and hold onto their careers to financially care for themselves and their families. This kind of interpersonal communication also puts workers into conceptual prisons, where people can believe they are failures when they lose their jobs. Still, messages received through interpersonal communication – containing directional themes of trust, reverence, and elevation from all members of the support network – will aid in new ideas about planful problem solving and positive reappraisal, leading an individual to thrive through the layoff scenario.

Encouragement, acceptance and belonging, affirmation, and problem solving

Although previous research by Folkman et al. (1986) could not determine causal inferences surrounding a stressor, this study effectively unpacked the interpersonal communication implications enveloping a layoff: When laid off workers in this study heard messages of encouragement, acceptance and belonging, affirmation, and problem solving – they were able to thrive and cope in healthy ways through the crisis. Moreover, job loss infringes on self-efficacy, because employment involves a level of performance and management over a situation – where interpersonal communication functions to assist in these areas. Research by Wiesenfeld et al. (2001) had shown when subjects engaged in activities which reaffirmed their self-integrity, they fared better. This research verifies that when those activities include social

support through purposeful interpersonal communication, then healthy coping takes place. Further, if messages surrounding a layoff are weak or ineffectual, interpersonal communication can inhibit a positive layoff outcome, manifested in self-efficacy and self-identity. So to help a laid off worker boost their acceptance and self-efficacy, exemplary messages can then be framed by the themes presented in this study:

- *You are going to make it. I am here for you*. (encouragement)

- *We miss you and wish you were still here with us*. (acceptance and belonging)

- *You are a skilled, talented person*. (affirmation)

- *I can help you to find work by lending a hand with your resume and reach this contact at another company*. (problem solving)

Although it was important for messages to contain these core themes, there are also quality and quantity issues to mention. Regarding quantity for example, if too many messages of *acceptance and belonging* were sent by workers left behind in the wake of a participant's layoff, then those workers appeared to be more concerned with their own needs, rather than the needs of the laid off worker, resulting in communication overload. Further, if messages did not achieve quality – such as members of the support network communicating panic about the job loss when comments may have been intended to generate *problem solving* – this interpersonal communication failed to accomplish its purpose.

Accordingly, this study shows when the content of interpersonal communication is purposeful and contained these core themes of encouragement, acceptance and belonging, affirmation, and problem solving – participants became healthy copers because messages left their self-efficacy intact through the layoff, even finding improved self-efficacy because job loss became a test they could pass with flying colours.

Trust, reverence, and elevation

With 10 out of 14 healthy copers in this study showing high levels of support through a job loss, it was clear that layoff victims were able to meet their emotional needs for social support through interpersonal communication – directionally representing trust, reverence, and elevating. Examples of purposeful messages contained the three themes:

- *I am listening. Tell me what you need. I am here for you*. (horizontal - trust)

- *I respect you. I miss your leadership here at the office*. (upward - reverence)

- *You had an important role and you did a great job*. (downward - elevating)

Social support acts as a buffer through periods of stress, giving people words of encouragement, acceptance and belonging, affirmation, and problem solving; previous research shows compensatory coping behaviour – in the form of social support – is common during acute stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As Wellman (1992) established, social support can come from any member from within an individual's personal community. This study demonstrates that eustress occurs when interpersonal communication is transacted through various members of the social network, and positive messages of trust, reverence, and elevation over present and future events are received.

Neutral ground, sanctuary, and former domain messages with purpose

Ideals and beliefs about a job loss victim's place in the world were also challenged by job loss – making acceptance an occasionally tricky concept to reach on a psychological level. ACT shows us that self concepts can be perilous – regardless of interpersonal communication tactics – such as situations where identity, shaped by a career is challenged. So, messages primarily with purpose (rather than reticent) delivered on neutral ground, in the sanctuary, and even

courageously relayed in the former domain or workplace, could assist with positive

psychological aspects of coping:

- *Friends and former co-workers should meet laid off workers in safe places, where healthy communication can take place* (neutral ground).

- *Workers left behind should contact laid off workers at home to offer support* (sanctuary).

- *Former colleagues should freely express their regret of the laid off worker's departure* (former domain).

In summary, this study shows that a person coping with job loss in a healthy way requires leaning on one's social network for purposeful interpersonal communication containing encouragement, acceptance and belonging, affirmation, and problem solving. This research also shows when subjects engage in interpersonal communication from every faction of a support network – expressing trust, reverence, and elevation – healthy coping and acceptance takes place. Furthermore, mental preparation about the possibility of downsizing in today's economies is paramount for workers; however, organizations need to recognize that workers will cope with a layoff in a healthier way, find a focal shift, reach acceptance, and even obtain reemployment faster for example – if workers have support from all members of the interpersonal communication network, especially from managers and direct supervisors. It is recommended that human resource personnel counsel supervisors to engage in interpersonal communication involving the directional and content themes outlined in this study. In addition, when family members and friends work together with layoff victims to find solutions to sudden unemployment – such as financial difficulties – through problem solving messages, members of the support network then become accomplices to planful problem solving actions: This is where

interpersonal communication content with encouragement, acceptance and belonging, affirmation, and problem solving guides both the layoff victim and family members to acceptance and healthy coping strategies. Therefore, purposeful interpersonal communication can be – and is – a beacon of light for layoff victims during the dark moments of job loss.

Conclusion

Layoffs are a constant activity of business and will continue to be. With this increasingly common practice comes an unemployed workforce aching for a bright side to the current economic state. This study uncovered the interpersonal communication factors which facilitate the social support, focal shift, and self-efficacy required for a positive layoff outcome. Firstly, interpersonal communication messages containing encouragement, acceptance and belonging, problem solving, and affirmation can facilitate acceptance and self-efficacy for an individual following job loss. Secondly, conditions of eustress reached when helpful, solutions-oriented messages are relayed to a layoff victim. Thirdly, the emotional needs of the layoff victim are at high levels, so purposeful interpersonal communication is gratifying when it comes from as many members of a support network as possible, reflecting trust, reverence, and elevation.

The present study shows it is helpful and even vitally necessary to provide support via interpersonal communication when helping people deal with job loss. 'People resources' as well as coping strategies affected certain areas of thriving despite stress. Participants who employed strong, planful problem solving coping strategies using the interpersonal communication content of encouragement, acceptance and belonging, affirmation, and problem solving were more likely to experience a stronger sense of self-efficacy – leading to personal growth – within their situation.

This research contributes to more than one area of academic literature because it combines interpersonal communication with psychology, taking a ground-breaking, important first step toward understanding the effects of layoffs in today's changing employment landscape. What this study accomplishes is *how* healthy coping can be achieved after a layoff, with interpersonal communication content containing encouragement, acceptance and belonging, affirmation, and problem solving – through directions that reflect trust, reverence, and elevation. As a result, this study shows how workers can create a blueprint of success through during a time of job loss trauma.

Limitations of this study include a small sample size ($n = 24$) and the static nature of the research. Even though an attempt was made to reach out to many regions across North America and to as many demographics of the workforce as possible, a more robust sample, such as a size of 100 or more participants, could lead to more concrete conclusions. Additionally, a longitudinal analysis could give an in-depth look at interpersonal communication strategies at critical points in time (at layoff, a week after layoff, and three months after a layoff). Also, a look at workers within a certain timeframe of a career would have uncovered research on coping strategies of specific workers; this could have included a focus on baby boomers who may have been close to retirement anyway – or workers who are mid-career and have financial demands surrounding their families. Despite these challenges, the in-depth nature and multi-method approach of this study (an initial questionnaire combined with a comprehensive interview) provided meaningful insights into interpersonal communication coping strategies surrounding a layoff. Findings were easily cross-validated, by linking survey data with interpersonal communication themes which corresponded with participant interpretations.

Possibilities for further research include additional examination of the timing and quality of support, the implications of increased control and clarification of a layoff (i.e. if having a say in an end date makes a difference for a laid off worker), and even gender and age differences in coping among laid off workers. Future research could include looking at moderators, such as in what specific timeframes verbal support might have the greatest impact, the organizational communication tactics of having direct supervisors involved in the layoff process when messages of appreciation or validation may be vital, and how women and men deal differently with job loss, in a society and culture where men are regarded as breadwinners.

References

Appelbaum, S.H., Lopes, R., Audet, L., Steed, A., Jacob, M., Augustinas, T., & Manolopoulos, D. (2003). Communication during downsizing of a telecommunications company. *Corporate Communications, 8*(2), 73-96.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bond, F.W. & Bunce, D. (2000). Outcomes and mediators of change in emotion-focussed and problem-focussed worksite stress management interventions. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 5, 156-163.

Bond, F.W. & Bunce, D. (2003). The role of acceptance and job control in mental health, job satisfaction, and work performance. *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, *88*(6), 1057-1067.

Caplan, R.D., Vinokur, A.D., Price, R.H., & van Ryn, M. (1989). Job seeking, reemployment, and mental health: A randomized field experiment in coping with job loss. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 74,* 759-769.

Caplan, R.D., Cobb, S., French, J.R.P., Harrison, R.V., & Pinneau, S.R. (1975). *Job demands and worker health: Main effects and occupational differences*. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research.

Creswell, J.W., & Plano Clark, V.L. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Limited.

Elving, W.J.L. (2005). The role of communication during organisational change. *Corporate Communications, 10*(2), 129-138.

Fields, D.L. (2002). Taking the measure of work: A guide to validated scales for organizational research and diagnosis. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Limited.

Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R.S. (1988). Coping as a mediator of emotion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54*, p. 466-475.

Folkman, S., Lazarus, R.S., Dunkel-Schetter, C., DeLongis, A., & Gruen, R. (1986). Dynamics of a stressful encounter: Cognitive appraisal, coping, and encounter outcomes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *50*(5), 992-1003.

Forsyth, D.R. (2009). *Group dynamics*. Florence, KY: Cengage Learning, Inc.

Grant, T. (2009, November 12). Layoffs came early in recession, study says. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved November 24, 2009, from http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/layoffs-came-early-in-recession-study-says/article1360611

Grbich, C. (1999). *Qualitative Research in Health*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Limited.

Hartley, P. (1999). *Interpersonal communication* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Hayes, S.C. (1987). A contextual approach to therapeutic change. In N. Jacobson (Ed.), *Psychotherapists in clinical practice*. New York: Guildford Press.

Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K.G. (1999). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: An experiential approach to behavior change*. New York: Guilford Press.

Hayes, S. C., Strosahl , K., Wilson, K. G., Bisett, R. T., Pistorello, J., & Toarmino, D. (2004). Measuring experiential avoidance: A preliminary test of a working model. *The Psychological Record, 54*, 553–578.

Hepworth, S. J. (1980). Moderating factors of the psychological impact of unemployment. *Journal of Occupational Psychology, 53,* 139-145.

Hullman, G. (2004). Interpersonal communication motives and message design logic: Exploring
their interaction on perceptions of competence. *Communication Monographs*, *71*(2), 208-225.

Knobloch, L.K. & Solomon, D.H. (2005). Relational uncertainty and relational information
processing. *Communication Research, 32*(3), 349-388.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand
Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Limited.

Lakey, S., & Canary, D. (2002). Actor goal achievement and sensitivity to partner as critical
factors in understanding interpersonal communication competence and conflict strategies.
Communication Monographs, *69*(3), 217.

Lazarus, R. & Folkman, S. (1985). If it changes it must be a process: Study of emotion and
coping during three stages of college examination. *Journal of Personality and Social
Psychology, 48*, 150-170.

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1987). Transactional theory and research on emotions and
coping. *European Journal of Personality, 1*(3), 141-169.

Leana, C. R., & Feldman, D. C. (1992). *Coping with job loss: How individuals, organizations,
and communities respond to layoffs.* New York, NY: Lexington Books.

Miles, M., & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Pearce, W.B. (1989). *Communication and the human condition*. Southern Illinois University,
Carbondale: Ill.

Pearson, J.E. (1986). The definition and measurement of social support. *Journal of Counseling
and Development, 64,* 390-395.

Peterson, C. & Seligman, M.E.P. (1987). Explanatory style and illness. *Journal of Personality*, *55*(2), 237-265.

Scheck, C.L., & Kinicki, A.J. (2000). Identifying antecedents of coping with an organizational acquisition: A structural assessment. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 21,* 627-648.

Schutz, W.C. (1966). *The interpersonal world*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.

Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). *Generalized Self-Efficacy scale*. In Weinman, J., Wright, S., & Johnston, M. *Measures in health psychology: A user's portfolio. Causal and control beliefs* (pp. 35-37). Windsor, UK: NFER-Nelson.

Selye, H. (1976). *The Stress of Life.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Steele, C.M. (1988). The psychology of self affirmation: Sustaining the integrity of the self. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances* in *experimental social psychology* (Vol. 21, pp. 261-302). New York: Academic Press.

Tourish, D., Paulsen, N., Hobman, E., & Bordia, P. (2004). The downsides of downsizing: Communication processes and information needs in the aftermath of a workforce reduction strategy. *Management Communication Quarterly, 17*(4), 485-516.

Walliman, N. (2005). *Your research project* (2nd ed.). London, UK: SAGE Publications Limited.

Wanberg, C.R. (1997). Antecedents and outcomes of coping behaviours among unemployed and reemployed individuals. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 82*(5), 731-744.

Wellman, B. (1992). Which types of ties and networks give what kinds of social support? *Advances in Group Processes*, *9*, 207-235.

Wiesenfeld, B., Brockner, J., Petzall, B., Wolf, R., & Bailey, J. (2001). Stress and coping among layoff survivors: A self-affirmation analysis. *Anxiety, Stress & Coping: An International Journal*, *14*(1), 15-34.

Wolcott, H.F. (1990). *Writing up qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications

    Limited.

Table 1

Healthy coping

Subject	Ways of Coping	GSE	SSS
4	Positive reappraisal/planful problem solving	20/30	21/48
5	Positive reappraisal/planful problem solving	15/30	30/48
8	Positive reappraisal/distancing	28/30	22/48
10	Positive reappraisal/planful problem solving	20/30	42/48
12	Positive reappraisal/planful problem solving	30/30	32/48
13	Positive reappraisal/planful problem solving	27/30	34/48
15	Positive reappraisal/seeking social support	23/30	32/48
16	Positive reappraisal/planful problem solving	28/30	36/48
17	Self-control/planful problem solving	29/30	32/48
19	Positive reappraisal/planful problem solving	23/30	33/48
20	Planful problem solving/seeking social support	23/30	30/48
21	Planful problem solving/seeking social support	28/30	27/30
22	Planful problem solving	28/30	45/48
23	Self-controlling/planful problem solving	29/30	29/48

Table 2

Unhealthy coping

Subject	Ways of Coping	GSE	SSS
1	Escape-avoidance	27/30	31/48
2	Escape-avoidance	20/30	35/48
3	Seeking social support/self-controlling	19/30	32/48
6	Escape-avoidance/self-controlling	22/30	32/48
7	Seeking social support/self-controlling	24/30	33/48
9	Self-controlling/escape-avoidance	18/30	25/48
11	Escape-avoidance/self-controlling	19/30	31/48
14	Self-controlling/seeking social support	22/30	26/48
18	Self-controlling	21/30	33/48
24	Seeking social support/escape-avoidance	14/30	37/48

Table 3 – Content of interpersonal communication

FIRO-B	Message/content	Emergent theme
Inclusion	"I belong to a woman's prayer group and they knew of my personal situation. The fact that they actually prayed for me is very comforting."	Belonging & acceptance
	"The day they had announced that I had lost my job, she said we almost had a full building rebellion."	Belonging & acceptance
	"They're saying we miss you and we want you to come back."	Belonging & acceptance
	"Having support from other friends who are also unemployed is quite valuable. We continue to urge each other on and think positively and we're helping each other find jobs."	Encouragement; problem solving
	"The fun elements were apparently me. Those are gone, and now people are afraid. It was pivotal for me, because I had no idea that I was that for them. They said the personality of the office was me."	Affirmation; acceptance & Belonging
Affection	"No one tells you while you're there if you're good or bad. It was good that they took the time to call."	Affirmation
	"Sorry to see you go, or you were the last we ever expected for this to happen to."	Belonging & Acceptance
	"It was reassuring, because she understood my feelings and what I wanted to do with this new beginning."	Affirmation; Encouragement
	"Verbal support as far as 'you'll find a new job, you'll land on your feet' – all that kind of good stuff."	Encouragement
	"A conversation between myself and two of my former staff. One of them was devastated with my position being eliminated. She wrote in my card, 'I am nothing without you.'"	Belonging & acceptance; affirmation
	"Most of the people who worked under me, had something to say... very positive about my management skills and my personality and just how I conduct business."	Belonging & acceptance; Affirmation
	"Verification, or like a 'you are a good person, it's meant to be, a chance to do something you really want to do' – those types of encouragement to get me through it."	Encouragement; affirmation
Control	"Encouraging words about the future, and you'll find a better fit and life balance."	Encouragement

"They would get me out of that mood, and swing it around and show me all the positive things as to why it is positive and not a stressful thing."	Encouragement; problem solving
"A written recommendation from her as well I know why I was laid off was not personal; it was business, which made it seem that much better."	Affirmation
"Truthfully, by losing the job and having the verbal support of pretty much everyone at [name removed], and my family and friends, that I regained the confidence."	Encouragement; affirmation
"I really didn't tell anybody. My parents thought it was a good thing that it happened because I wasn't happy at my job."	Affirmation; encouragement

Table 4 – Direction of interpersonal communication

FIRO-B	Direction	Example	Emergent theme
Inclusion	Horizontal	"I belong to a woman's prayer group…"	Trust
	Upward	"She said we almost had a full building rebellion."	Elevating
	Horizontal	"They're saying we miss you…"	Trust
	Horizontal	"Having support from other friends who are also unemployed is quite valuable…"	Trust
	Horizontal; downward	"The fun elements were apparently me."	Trust
Affection	Horizontal; downward	"It was good that they took the time to call."	Reverence
	Horizontal	"Sorry to see you go…"	Trust
	Downward	"She understood my feelings…"	Reverence
	Horizontal	"Verbal support as far as 'you'll find a new job, you'll land on your feet'…"	Trust
	Downward	"She wrote in my card, 'I am nothing without you.'"	Reverence
	Downward	"Most of the people who worked under me, had something to say... very positive…"	Reverence
	Horizontal	"Verification, or like a 'you are a good person…"	Trust
Control	Horizontal; downward	"Encouraging words about the future…"	Trust; reverence
	Horizontal	"They would get me out of that mood…"	Trust
	Downward	"A written recommendation from her…"	Elevating
	Downward; upward; horizontal; grapevine	"Having the verbal support of pretty much everyone…"	Elevating; trust; reverence
	Downward	"My parents thought it was a good thing…"	Elevating

Table 5 – Channel of interpersonal communication

FIRO-B	Channel	Example	Emergent theme
Inclusion	Public place (church)	"I belong to a woman's prayer group…"	Neutral ground
	Home by phone	"She said we almost had a full building rebellion..."	Sanctuary
	Home by phone	"They're saying we miss you..."	Sanctuary
	Public place; friend's home	"Having support from other friends who are also unemployed is quite valuable…"	Neutral ground; sanctuary
	Public place	"The fun elements were apparently me."	Neutral ground
Affection	Home by phone	"It was good that they took the time to call."	Sanctuary
	Workplace	"Sorry to see you go…"	Former domain
	Home	"She understood my feelings…"	Sanctuary
	Home by phone	"Verbal support as far as 'you'll find a new job, you'll land on your feet'…"	Sanctuary
	Public place	"She wrote in my card, 'I am nothing without you.'"	Neutral ground
	Workplace	"Most of the people who worked under me, had something to say... very positive…"	Former domain
	Public place	"Verification, or like a 'you are a good person…"	Neutral ground
Control	Public place	"Encouraging words about the future…"	Neutral ground
	Public place (coffee shop)	"They would get me out of that mood…"	Neutral ground
	Workplace	"A written recommendation from her…"	Former domain
	Public place	"Having the verbal support of pretty much everyone…"	Neutral ground
	Home	"My parents thought it was a good thing…"	Sanctuary

Table 6 – Style of interpersonal communication

FIRO-B	Style	Example	Emergent theme
Inclusion	Group; formal	"I belong to a woman's prayer group…"	Reticent; purposeful
	Informal	"She said we almost had a full building rebellion."	Purposeful
	Informal	"They're saying we miss you..."	Purposeful
	Informal	"Having support from other friends who are also unemployed is quite valuable…"	Purposeful
	Informal	"The fun elements were apparently me."	Purposeful
Affection	Informal	"It was good that they took the time to call."	Purposeful
	Informal	"Sorry to see you go…"	Purposeful
	Informal	"She understood my feelings…"	Purposeful
	Informal	"Verbal support as far as 'you'll find a new job, you'll land on your feet'…"	Purposeful
	Group; informal	"She wrote in my card, 'I am nothing without you.'"	Purposeful
	Group; informal	"Most of the people who worked under me, had something to say... very positive…"	Purposeful
	Informal	"Verification, or like a 'you are a good person…"	Purposeful
Control	Informal	"Encouraging words about the future…"	Purposeful
	Informal	"They would get me out of that mood…"	Purposeful
	Formal	"A written recommendation from her…"	Reticent
	Informal	"Having the verbal support of pretty much everyone…"	Purposeful
	Informal	"My parents thought it was a good thing…"	Purposeful

Appendix A – Recruitment Letter for Participants

Getting Through Tough Times: Interpersonal Communication Coping Strategies During Job Loss

Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear Sir/Madam:

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled **Getting Through Tough Times: Interpersonal Communication Coping Strategies During Job Loss** by Julie Nolin, a student researcher with Royal Roads University. You may contact me if you have further questions by phoning or by emailing me.

The proposed field study and experiment will investigate interpersonal communication coping strategies, using surveys and audio-taped interviews by phone or Skype. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include taking part in a 10-15 minute survey, followed by a 15-30 minute interview to inquire further into the strategies you used when you lost your job.

Risks posed by the research are minimal but may include emotional stress associated with recalling and describing your layoff experience. The potential benefits to you include the possibility of developing coping strategies and tools for people confronting job loss.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, your data will be used only if you give permission.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Julie Nolin

M.A. Candidate in Professional Communication, with a specialization in Intercultural and International Communication

Appendix B – Participant Consent Form

Getting Through Tough Times: Interpersonal Communication Coping Strategies During Job Loss

Participant Consent Form

The proposed field study and experiment will investigate interpersonal communication coping strategies. My name is Julie Nolin, and I am a graduate student at Royal Roads University in Victoria, BC – and I will be the principal investigator for this study. You are being invited to participate in a study entitled **Getting Through Tough Times: Interpersonal Communication Coping Strategies During Job Loss**. You may contact me if you have further questions by phoning or by emailing me.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include taking part in a 10-15 minute survey, followed by a 15-30 minute audio-taped interview to inquire further into the strategies you used when you lost your job. You may also be asked to partake in a 'transcript review process' to verify the nature, meaning, and intent of the content and themes derived from the interview process for 20-30 minutes or a follow up interview to evaluate the results from the research.

Risks posed by the research are minimal but may include emotional stress associated with recalling and describing your layoff experience. The potential benefits to you include the possibility of developing coping strategies and tools for people confronting job loss.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, your data will be used only if you give permission by stating and signing your agreement to the analysis and inclusion of your data despite your withdrawal.

All information will be treated with a certain degree of anonymity. Anonymity is not entirely possible when using the interview method because of the researcher/participant relationship required. To ensure privacy at the time of data collection, interviews will be conducted in a private office. All participants will remain anonymous in reporting the results of the study. Both individual names and that of the organization will not be mentioned in the data collection or study report. Managers will not be informed of who is and who is not participating in the study; therefore, participants can be confident that participation or non-participation will have no effect on their employment status.

The researcher will also maintain appropriate confidentiality of information in creating, storing, accessing, transferring and disposing of records under her control, whether these are written, automated or in any other medium. The consent form will be kept separate from the data and both will be in secure and separate filing cabinets. Utilization of the data from this study will be limited to the purposes of this study only.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways:

- summary paper may be submitted to journal for publication or used for conference presentation
- elements of summary paper may be used for publication in a book

You may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Office of Research at Royal Roads University.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher

Appendix C – Participant Survey

Interpersonal communication & layoff: Survey questionnaire – Julie Nolin
Royal Roads University, MAPC-IIC

1. Please disclose your name and age.

2. What city and province/state do you currently live in?

3. How many years – of your adult life – have you been working? In particular, how many years would you say form your career or livelihood?

___ 0-5 years

___ 5-10 years

___ 10-20 years

___ 20-30 years

___ 35+ years

4. When did you most recently lose your job?

Please respond to the following questions indicating how often each strategy is used following your layoff:

5. Just concentrated on what I had to do next – the next step.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

6. I did something which I didn't think would work, but at least I was doing something.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

7. Tried to get the person responsible to change his or her mind.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

8. Talked to someone to find out more about the situation.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

9. Criticized or lectured myself.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat

_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

10. Tried not to burn my bridges, but leave things open somewhat.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

11. Hoped a miracle would happen.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

12. Went along with fate; sometimes I just have bad luck.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

13. Went on as if nothing had happened.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

14. I tried to keep my feelings to myself.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

15. Looked for the silver lining, so to speak; tried to look on the bright side of things.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

16. Slept more than usual.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

17. I expressed anger to the person(s) who caused the problem

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

18. Accepted sympathy and understanding from someone.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

19. I told myself things that helped me feel better.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

20. I was inspired to do something creative.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

21. Tried to forget the whole thing.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

22. I got professional help.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

23. Changed or grew as a person in a good way.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

24. I waited to see what would happen before doing anything.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

25. I apologized or did something to make up.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

26. I made a plan of action and followed it.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

27. I accepted the next best thing to what I wanted.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

28. I let my feelings out somehow.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

29. Realized I brought the problem on myself.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

30. I came out of the experience better than when I went in.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

31. Talked to someone who could do something concrete about the problem.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

32. Got away from it for a while; tried to rest or take a vacation.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

33. Tried to make myself feel better by eating, drinking, smoking, using drugs or medication, etc.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

34. Took a big chance or did something very risky.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

35. I tried not to act too hastily or follow my first hunch.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

36. Found new faith.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

37. Maintained my pride and kept a stiff upper lip.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

38. Rediscovered what is important in life.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

39. Changed something so things would turn out all right.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

40. Avoided being with people in general.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

41. Didn't let it get to me; refused to think too much about it.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

42. I asked a relative or friend I respected for advice.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

43. Kept others from knowing how bad things were.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

44. Made light of the situation; refused to get too serious about it.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

45. Talked to someone about how I was feeling.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

46. Stood my ground and fought for what I wanted.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

47. Took it out on other people.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

48. Drew on my past experiences; I was in a similar situation before.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

49. I knew what had to be done, so I doubled my efforts to make things work.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

50. Refused to believe that it had happened.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

51. I made a promise to myself that things would be different next time.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

52. Came up with a couple of different solutions to the problem.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

53. Accepted it, since nothing could be done.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

54. I tried to keep my feelings from interfering with other things too much.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

55. Wished that I could change what had happened or how I felt.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

56. I changed something about myself.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

57. I daydreamed or imagined a better time or place than the one I was in.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

58. Wished that the situation would go away or somehow be over with.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

59. Had fantasies or wishes about how things might turn out.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

60. I prayed.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat
_____ used quite a bit _____ used a great deal

61. I prepared myself for the worst.

_____ does not apply and/or not used _____ used somewhat

____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

62. I went over in my mind what I would say or do.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

63. I thought about how a person I admire would handle this situation and used that as a model.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

64. I tried to see things from the other person's point of view.

____ does not apply and/or not used ____ used somewhat
____ used quite a bit ____ used a great deal

In this next section, please answer the following questions surrounding your layoff:

65. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.
___ not at all true ___ hardly true ___ moderately true ___ exactly true

66. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.
___ not at all true ___ hardly true ___ moderately true ___ exactly true

67. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.
___ not at all true ___ hardly true ___ moderately true ___ exactly true

68. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.
___ not at all true ___ hardly true ___ moderately true ___ exactly true

69. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.
___ not at all true ___ hardly true ___ moderately true ___ exactly true

70. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.
___ not at all true ___ hardly true ___ moderately true ___ exactly true

71. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.
___ not at all true ___ hardly true ___ moderately true ___ exactly true

72. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.
___ not at all true ___ hardly true ___ moderately true ___ exactly true

73. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.
___ not at all true ___ hardly true ___ moderately true ___ exactly true

74. I can usually handle whatever comes my way.
___ not at all true ___ hardly true ___ moderately true ___ exactly true

For the next set of questions, please indicate where you found support through your layoff:

75. How much does each of these people go out of their way to do things to make your work life/job loss easier for you?

       A. Your former supervisor

       ___ very much ___ somewhat ___ a little ___ not at all ___ don't have such person

       B. Other people from work

       ___ very much ___ somewhat ___ a little ___ not at all ___ don't have such person

       C. Your spouse, friends, and relatives

       ___ very much ___ somewhat ___ a little ___ not at all ___ don't have such person

76. How easy is it to talk with each of the following people?

       A. Your former supervisor

       ___ very much ___ somewhat ___ a little ___ not at all ___ don't have such person

       B. Other people from work

       ___ very much ___ somewhat ___ a little ___ not at all ___ don't have such person

       C. Your spouse, friends, and relatives

       ___ very much ___ somewhat ___ a little ___ not at all ___ don't have such person

77. How much did each of these people be relied on when things got tough?

       A. Your former supervisor

       ___ very much ___ somewhat ___ a little ___ not at all ___ don't have such person

       B. Other people from work

       ___ very much ___ somewhat ___ a little ___ not at all ___ don't have such person

       C. Your spouse, friends, and relatives

       ___ very much ___ somewhat ___ a little ___ not at all ___ don't have such person

78. How much is each of the following people willing to listen to your personal problems?

       A. Your former supervisor

       ___ very much ___ somewhat ___ a little ___ not at all ___ don't have such person

       B. Other people from work

       ___ very much ___ somewhat ___ a little ___ not at all ___ don't have such person

       C. Your spouse, friends, and relatives

       ___ very much ___ somewhat ___ a little ___ not at all ___ don't have such person

Appendix D – Telephone Script

Research Project Telephone Script
Julie Nolin, MAPC-IIC

- My name is Julie Nolin, and I am a graduate student at Royal Roads University.
- You have been invited to participate in a research project surrounding interpersonal communication coping strategies during job loss. This portion of the study should take no more than 30 minutes – and I will ask you eight questions in total. One or more questions may be sensitive to you, and you may choose not to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with.
- This phone call is being recorded on a personal computer. This recording will be given a code number, stored separately from the computer system to protect your privacy.
- Risks posed by the research are minimal but may include emotional stress associated with recalling and describing your layoff experience. The potential benefits to you include the possibility of developing coping strategies and tools for people confronting job loss.
- I want to assure you that you are free not to participate, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without prejudice to pre-existing entitlements. As well, it is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: a summary paper may be submitted to journal for publication or used for conference presentation, and/or elements of the summary paper may be used for publication in a book.
- Can I answer any questions before we begin?
- Also, I want to offer the name and telephone number of a person who can verify the authenticity of the research project. Do you require this information at this time? (Dr. Jennifer Walinga's info here).
- I am not aware of any conflicts of interest. Are you aware of any at this time?
- Can we proceed?

Appendix E – Interview Questions

Interpersonal communication & layoff: Interview questions – Julie Nolin
Royal Roads University, MAPC-IIC

1. Can you describe the kinds of verbal support you received from others following your layoff?

2. If your layoff caused you to experience stress, how did talking to people about your job loss help you?

3. Describe a pivotal conversation with your former employer after your layoff.

4. Describe a pivotal conversation with your partner/spouse or family after your layoff.

5. Describe a pivotal conversation with a friend or former co-worker after your layoff.

6. What kinds of messages, if any, did you hear from people around you which helped – and why?

7. What kinds of messages, if any, did you hear from people around you which did not help – and why?

8. What new things, if any, did you discover about yourself through conversations with your family, friends, former co-workers, and former supervisor?