



Case in Point: Can Tragedy Lead to Change?

On April 24, 2013, more than 900 garment workers were killed in a catastrophic building collapse at a factory in Bangladesh's Rana Plaza. It was the world's worst industrial disaster since the massive gas leak tragedy in Bhopal, India, in 1984. Greenwald and Hirsch (2013) note that the reaction to the factory collapse followed a typical pattern: "News article after news article focuses on finding the smoking gun, as if there were only one cause and as if minus that cause, those workers would be safe today. Or coverage treats these tragedies as natural disasters with a rush of charity before public attention turns to the next event."

Greenwald and Hirsch (2013), however, believe that the tragedy in Bangladesh should be used as an impetus to spur on communication about the global apparel industry. Because corporations outsource a great deal of the labor associated with producing clothing, the cost of apparel has fallen 30% since 1994. Some may see this as a worthy outcome of globalization, but Greenwald and Hirsch ask "to what extent is our demand for a \$5

T-shirt or deep discounts on jeans responsible for disasters like this?" They compare the building collapse in Bangladesh to an industrial disaster of a century earlier—the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York City in 1911—and note that this fire (in which 146 were killed) has "become a stand-in for the terrible problems of an industrializing nation" and led to collective protests that eventually resulted in important safety codes, regulations, and labor law reforms. Though obviously many things have changed in 100 years, the processes of globalization have led to disturbing similarities: "Our clothes come from places like Rana, where the average work is, as in 1911, a young girl working in terrible conditions for starvation wages" (Greenwald & Hirsch, 2013). Though the issues are complex and implicate issues of economics, local government, and culture, we can only hope that horrible events like this can open up dialogue regarding the moral responsibility of consumers to support workers who toil in the global marketplace.

For individuals and organizations in the post-9/11 world, the implications of terrorism are everywhere but can be especially seen in two widespread areas: the **war on terror** and **homeland security**. Perhaps the most basic concern is for an understanding of how terrorist networks and terrorist organizations are constituted, operate, and grow (Stohl & Stohl, 2007, 2011). Such an understanding would involve a consideration of how terrorist organizations recruit and socialize their members, how terrorist cells make decisions and develop leadership, and how terrorist networks form interconnections through technology and interpersonal contact. But a consideration of the war on terror has also come to encompass military interventions, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, organizational communication scholars must also be cognizant of the complex communication processes involved in military actions and bureaucracy and the complexities of dealing with military personnel and their families during and after their service. The implications of the war on terror for organizational communication also include complex political negotiations with a wide range of government entities and the creation and dissemination of organizational rhetoric to connect institutional goals with public opinion. In the communication discipline, one important direction for research has been led by Steve Corman and his colleagues at the Center for Strategic Communication at Arizona State University. These scholars have