A STUDY OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION DESIGNED TO DEVELOP
GENERIC CRISIS COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

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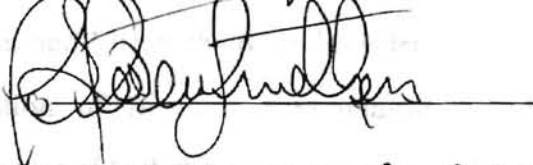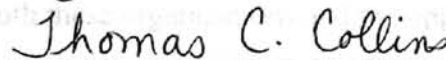# A STUDY OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION DESIGNED TO DEVELOP GENERIC CRISIS COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Some mass media researchers believe that organizational crises are inevitable. For example, according to Mitroff, Shrivastava, and Udwadia, "it is no longer the question of whether a major disaster will strike any organization, but only a question of *when, how, what form it will take, and who and how many will be affected.*"[1]* Probably that is why such crucial moments attract the increasing attention of mass communication scholars and practitioners.

Crisis is a period when efficiency of the public relations structures of the organization is tested under extreme circumstances. These times of crises especially highlight the skillfulness of PR personnel. Nevertheless, sometimes emotions can prevent PR people from being effective during turbulent periods. What to do first? How to do it properly? These and other questions can be overwhelmingly difficult even for very experienced practitioners in the first moments of crisis. That is why many organizations try to reduce the pressure on PR people so that there are fewer chances to make mistakes. For this purpose, organizations prepare crisis plans. There are two main goals for crisis plans: to tell emotionally overloaded people what to do and then how to do it. According to Fink "The contingency plan deals with the mechanics of the crisis in order to save precious time for the crisis management team, which will have to deal with the content of the crisis."[2]

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* Emphasis in original text.

Background

General

      Although crisis communication attracts the attention of mass media scholars there are still very few books and dissertations covering this topic. Most books and studies examine how particular crises were handled or look at extreme situations from a theoretical standpoint.

      For example, there are several textbooks that just touch this area.[3] Each of these books has a chapter devoted to crisis PR. These chapters contain basic definitions, explanations of the necessity for crisis plans, and the meaning of crisis PR. Also, they contain some case studies.

      There are some books devoted especially to crisis management, including crisis PR. For example, Fink discusses such problems as crisis forecasting; crisis management planing; identifying, isolating, and managing the crisis; crisis communication process; decision making under crisis stress; and some case studies.[4] Barton examines such aspects as crisis and public opinion, communication as a management tool, environmental impact, personnel training, crisis management planning, and others.[5] Brody explores such issues as risk management, typologies and origins of crises, dealing with stakeholders, etc.[6]

      There are several doctoral dissertations covering different aspects of crisis communication. Some of them discuss particular PR cases, and they are really thorough case studies.[7] At the same time, there are some works of another kind. Marra's dissertation is a very theoretical work. It considers the effect of such variables as risk communication, crisis communication, the pre-crisis relationship with the media, crisis communication practices, organizational communication ideology, and autonomy of public relations practitioners with respect to the general efficiency of an organization.[8] The work of J. Hurd develops a layered model of tools that supports the communication necessary for the effective performance of crisis triage. Through this model the author

offers pragmatically sound principles for organizing a crisis response system and process.[9]

Theoretical Framework

The process of developing a theoretical comprehension of crisis public relations is at its very initial stage. Nevertheless, a theory that may be effectively applied for the exploration of such situations was proposed by J. E. Grunig and L. A. Grunig. While this theory concerns the PR process in general, it can help the understanding of what underlies crisis PR and why it should be practiced in a particular way.

The Grunigs proposed four models of public relations, that is "four typical ways of conceptualizing and practicing communication management."[10] They wrote:

> The *press agentry* model applies when a communication program strives for favorable publicity, especially in the mass media. A program based on the *public information* model uses 'journalists in residence' to disseminate relatively objective information through the mass media and controlled media such as newsletters, brochures, and direct mail.[11]*

The above are one-way models. Basically this means that the information goes only from an organization to its publics. The PR programs following these models are not based on research or strategic planning. These models are also called "asymmetrical"[12] ones. "They try to make the organization look good either through propaganda (press agentry) or by disseminating only favorable information (public information)."[13]

Further, the Grunigs wrote about other two models:

> The third model, the *two-way asymmetrical* model, is a more sophisticated approach in that it uses research to develop messages that are most likely to persuade strategic publics to behave as the organization wants. ... *Two-way*

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* Emphasis in original text.

symmetrical describes a model of public relations that is based on research and that uses communication to manage conflict and improve understanding with strategic publics.[14*]

The Grunigs wrote that most modern, sophisticated PR people "do not practice a pure symmetrical model."[15] Mostly, they practice a so called "*mixed-motive* model,"[16] which is a combination of the two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical models. Nevertheless, since the mixed-motive model is the mixture of the two others it is not considered a separate one.

It is very important to understand the concept of the four models because the PR practice of a particular organization depends directly on which theoretical model underlies it. Depending on the prevailing model, an organization's management selects its PR strategies, tactics, and problem - coping techniques.

Statement of the Problem

Knowledge in the area of crisis communication is quite unsystematic. Usually, an author takes some particular segments of the problem and explores them in relation to several case studies.

In the real world, a crisis communication plan is composed by the organization's PR staff and reflects the staff's experience, education, and professional philosophy. Certainly, there are several textbooks where everybody can find some basic recommendations concerning crisis communication. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to say what underlies those recommendations. It is logical to suppose that the authors analyzed case studies, professional literature, and personal experience. However, it would be difficult to know specifically the material and scope of their analysis. In every case, a reader has to rely on the opinion of an author of a particular book. But no one knows which crisis recommendations should be included in every contingency plan and

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* Emphasis in original text.

which of them are just techniques that worked out very well in a couple of cases but may not work out under other circumstances.

The problem is the lack of reliable scientific information in the area of crisis communication, that is, the lack of extensive research that would explore a large volume of material coming from a variety of sources. Only such research could highlight the basic common elements of crisis response and, consequently, the common elements of the crisis plan.

Purpose of Study

One may study the crisis responses of various organizations. For example, if many different organizations, under different circumstances, repeatedly used a certain PR tool, tactic, or technique, it may mean that such a tool, tactic, or technique is a basic element of crisis response and, consequently, may be recommended for crisis planning guidelines. One may also study the ideas of PR experts. For example, if many PR experts from different organizations, for different situations, repeatedly recommend a certain PR tool, tactic, or technique, it might mean that such a tool, tactic, or technique can be included in crisis planning guidelines. Books, textbooks, articles, real world crisis communication plans, opinions of PR practitioners, must all be included in such a study. If there are common points that worked well in the crisis coping process they would be very important for the PR practitioner.

The researcher's task in this study was to find such basic common elements of the crisis coping process. The main purpose was to come up with crisis communication guidelines that would logically derive from the scientific analysis of the large amount of diverse material and reflect the wide scope of American PR practice.

Methodology

Generally, this study is qualitative research analyzing information from secondary as well as primary sources. There are two main phases in the research.

The first one is the Archival Integrative Research Review that examines real world crisis communication plans, case studies, and articles written by mass media scholars and practitioners The main sources of information for the study are archives and files of information centers of the Public Relations Society of America and International Association of Business Communicators

The main task of the first phase is to look at how often PR tools, methods of work, or steps of the PR process are mentioned or stipulated as mandatory ones in real world crisis communication plans. The findings of the content analysis of the plans will be supported by the study of the cases that have been the entries for or winners of the major PR awards. The main objective of the case studies is to find out what tools and methods worked best and under what circumstances. The literature review will help to increase the scope of the study and to support or reject the previous findings with conclusions based on the published opinions of other researchers and practitioners.

For triangulation, 10 in-depth interviews with public relations practitioners working in Oklahoma have been undertaken. The analysis of the results are the second phase of the research. The inferences will be based on the broad ground of practical experience of the real-world PR practitioners as well as on the scholarly literature.

The recommendations for composition of the crisis communication guidelines will be grounded on the answers to the following research questions.

What are the common elements of crisis plans?

What are the basic elements of crisis response?

Elements included are the main steps or actions made by a PR person, the sequence of the steps, the most effective tools and methods of PR work during the crisis time, and the most useful channels of information.

The main objective of the study is to create generic crisis public relations guidelines. The guidelines will grow out of the recommendations based on the analysis of modern PR practice as well as the scientific works devoted to the same topic and will include all the above mentioned elements common to American PR practice.

Significance of the Study

Steven Fink wrote: "The symbol for their [Chinese] word 'crisis' - called *wei-ji* - is actually combination of two words, 'danger' and 'opportunity'."[17*] According to Stephenson, a crisis focuses attention on one concern, calls for cooperation, and gives the company a chance to demonstrate its capabilities and concern for people affected and for the interests of the community involved.[18] It is a positive aspect of crisis. The philosophical significance of this work is that PR practitioners should learn to turn "danger" into "opportunity" through thoroughly prepared and scientifically grounded crisis communication guidelines.

Of course, this thesis will be of no interest to huge companies such as British Petroleum that can spend several years and millions of dollars for elaboration of their own crisis plans. At the same time, this study may be of some interest to small companies that cannot spend a lot of money and time for elaboration of serious and huge crisis plans. In their cases this thesis might be a basis for designing their own plans. Besides that, small companies often have no PR staff and experienced practitioners in this area. That is why this work might be even more interesting to them.

Also, this study may be of value to scholars and students of PR because it will provide additional information on the important area of crisis communication. Nobody has done the same study before. That is why it contributes new information to the PR field in theoretical as well as practical dimensions.

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* Emphasis in original text.

Besides that, this research may be interesting for countries that are just starting their "free market" journey (such as Russia and other countries of Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union). There are no PR education programs, counselors, or people with PR experience in these countries. The new PR people have no access to information centers like those of PRSA and IABC. In crisis situations they tend to act unprofessionally and the consequences of their actions are sometimes dangerous. They cannot communicate the ideas of their chiefs or clients (government or business people) to the general public. But without skills in this area, civil peace in the society is impossible. It would be very good if by using this research even inexperienced PR people would be able to design a crisis communication plan which would help them do the right things at the right time.

Finally, it is necessary to highlight the meaning of crisis planning as did Laurence Barton:

> A single crisis could alter your life and career. A CMP [crisis management plan] lets you test how you will treat people inside and outside your organization during moments of intense stress. It will challenge you to consider issues and individuals with whom you have had little contact. One day it could be the tool you use to save lives, protect assets, and retain or even enhance your company's image.[19]

Besides that, Ramee believes that crisis planning can be an invaluable tool for anticipating, avoiding, and managing the next crisis.[20]

Scope and Limitations

There are several limitations that must be noted.

First, the number of analyzed crisis communication plans are limited by those contained in the information centers of PRSA and IABC. Usually, companies are reluctant to show their plans to anybody or donate them to the researchers. The next limitation directly derives from this fact. Most of the plans analyzed for this study are

so called "retired ones", that is, they have been revised by the companies. Although they reflect the views and PR philosophy of the firms, they are not the latest versions.

The literature covering crisis communication is very dynamic. Every month one can find something new concerning this topic, and it is impossible to examine everything published. The same concerns case studies; the latest of them are not covered by this research.

The most up-to-date part of the study is the in-depth interviews. They demonstrate the latest trends in crisis PR. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to note that all of them were conducted in two major cities in Oklahoma. Although this situation has its advantages because these interviews reflect the views and beliefs of the mainstream PR practitioners, it is also a limitation for this study.

Besides that it is important to point out that all the material for this research was taken from American PR practice and it is necessary to be very careful about transferring this experience to foreign soil.

Finally, the conclusions of this research may be directly applied only to business or corporate public relations. Political PR is not within the scope of this study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter II of the thesis explains in details the general methodology of this research. For each of the three methods (integrative literature review, content analysis, and in-depth interviews) the characteristics of population, sample, time frame, and others are discussed. This chapter comes before the literature review because the latter contains research findings applicable to this study. It would be sound, first of all, to explain how this study is done and only after that, step by step, without interruptions, recount the whole research process.

Chapter III is a report of the results of the content analysis of real world crisis communication plans and PR case studies.

Chapter IV is devoted to the integrative literature review that examines the books, dissertations, and articles devoted to the study's topic.

Chapter V is devoted to the in-depth interviews. It points out the crisis coping process elements that appear to be common for contemporary American PR practice.

The last chapter brings together the inferences from the previous three chapters and provides the PR crisis guidelines based on those inferences.

ENDNOTES:

[1] I.I. Mitroff, T.C. Shrivastava, and F.E. Udwadia, "Effective Crisis Management," Academy of Management Executive, Vol.1,No.3 (1987): 291.

[2] Steven Fink, Crisis Management (New York, NY: American Management Association, 1986), 56.

[3] See Dennis L. Wilcox, Phillip H. Ault, and Warren K. Agee, Public Relations: Strategies and Tactics (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992); Jerry A. Hendrix. Public Relation Cases (Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995); Fraser P. Seitel, The Practice of Public Relations (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995).

[4] Steven Fink, Crisis Management (New York, NY: American Management Association, 1986).

[5] Laurence Barton, Crisis in Organizations: Managing and Communicating in the Heat of Chaos (Cincinnati, Ohio: College Division of South-Western Publishing Company, 1993).

[6] E.W. Brody, Managing Communication Processes: from Planning to Crisis Response (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1991).

[7] Sally Jean Ray, "Postcrisis Investigation: the National Transportation Safety Board and the Airline Industry" (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 1991); William L. Benoit, "A Burkean Analysis of the 1982 and 1986 Tylenol Poisoning Tragedies" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 1987).

[8] Francis E. Marra, "Crisis Public Relations: a Theoretical Model" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland at College Park, 1992).

[9] Joanne Elaine Hurd, "Crisis Response Tools: a Layered Model of Communication Support" (Ph.D. diss., Texas Technical University, 1992).

[10] James E. Grunig, "Communication, Public Relations, and Effective Organizations: An Overview of the Book," in Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management, ed. James E. Grunig (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1992), 18.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 19.

[16] Ibid., 19.

[17] Steven Fink, Crisis Management (New York, NY: American Management Association, 1986), 1.

[18] D.R. Stephenson, "How to turn pitfalls into opportunities in crisis situations," Public Relations Quarterly (1982): 11-15; quoted in Sally Jean Ray, "Postcrisis Investigation: the National Transportation Safety Board and the Airline Industry" (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 1991), 6.

[19] Laurence Barton, Crisis in Organizations: Managing and Communicating in the Heat of Chaos (Cincinnati, Ohio: College Division of South-Western Publishing Company, 1993), 12-13.

[20] J. Ramee, "Managing a crisis," Management Solutions (1987): 25-29; quoted in Sally Jean Ray, "Postcrisis Investigation: the National Transportation Safety Board and the Airline Industry" (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 1991), 10.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will explain in detail how this study was done. It will discuss the general research approach and objectives, sampling, data collection and analysis procedures. It will discuss the scope of the study, and how widely the research results may be generalized.

Purpose of the Study

The most common method of exploring crisis communication is by case study. Occasionally, case study authors point out that a particular step was a good choice for a particular situation or that a particular PR tool worked very well under the circumstances. There are some textbooks that provide guidelines for crisis response plans. Nevertheless, it is difficult to know what underlies those guidelines: what was the material, scope and methods of analysis. Plus, there is little formal extensive research in this area. That is why it remains unclear how well those guidelines are scientifically substantiated.

The purpose of this study is to fill this gap in crisis communication research. The main task is to make the study as comprehensive as possible, that is to use a large variety of methods for analysis of the diverse material coming from a large variety of sources. The final purpose of the study is to create crisis communication guidelines grounded on real world PR practice and formal research.

Research Approach

This study is qualitative research analyzing data from primary as well as secondary sources. Qualitative techniques seem to be the most appropriate for the crisis communication problem. Miles and Huberman wrote:

> The great advantage of qualitative research is that it can change direction easily and refocus data collection for the next field trip. Conceptual frameworks are simply the current versions of the researcher's map of the territory being investigated. ... Samples in qualitative studies can change. Initial choices of informants lead to the recommendations of new informants; comparing one class of events calls for a comparison with a different class. ... In other words, qualitative research is essentially an investigative process, not unlike detective work.[1]

As it was mentioned above, crisis public relations is not well explored. Often, it is difficult to expect particular outcomes from a study, that is, to formulate definite hypotheses. That is why qualitative research methods that allow much flexibility are the best ones for a study in this area.

There are two main phases in this research.

The first phase of the study consists of two stages. The first one is archival research. The material for this research was provided by the Public Relations Society of America and the International Association of Business Communicators from the archives of their information centers. The material consists of real world crisis communication plans of major American companies; PR cases (most of them are winners of or entrants for major PR awards); conference papers and presentations on crisis topics; and articles published in professional journals and magazines.

Crises communication plans will be analyzed first. Since they reflect real world practice and the personal experience of PR professionals working for major Americans companies, it is important to discuss what elements of crisis response are included in those plans because it is reasonable to suppose that the PR practitioners consider them

as the most common and effective elements. The research method will be content analysis.

Content analysis is a very popular mass media research method because it gives many opportunities and may be used at any phase of a study. There are many definitions of content analysis. Wimmer and Dominick mention some of them:

> Walizer and Wienir (1978) define it as any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information; Krippendorf (1980) defines it as a research technique for making replicable and valid references from data to their context. Kerlinger's (1986) definition is fairly typical: content analysis is a method of study and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables.[2]

Each of these definitions may be chosen for the purposes of this study.

The same authors defined five main purposes of content analysis in mass media studies: 1) describing communication content; 2) testing hypotheses of message characteristics; 3) comparing media content to the "real world"; 4) assessing the image of particular groups in society; and 5) establishing a starting point for studies of media effects.[3] Since the crisis plan is a form of communication, the content analysis purpose of this study falls into the first category.

It is necessary to note that content analysis in this particular study is neither formal quantitative nor purely qualitative. It falls somewhere in between.

The other research method used in the first phase of this study is a combination of case study and content analysis. This method is determined by the character of the material. Actually, the materials are brief descriptions of public relation cases that were entries for or winners of the major PR awards of PRSA and IABC. Physically, each of them is just two or three single-spaced pages. The content is a brief introduction of a PR problem, explanation of the PR actions, and evaluation of the results. The examination of such materials may be considered a case study.

According to Marra:

> The case study is a form of qualitative research that often uses several research methodologies to contextually examine a particular situation or phenomenon. ... The strengths of case studies are particularly well-suited to this investigation of crisis public relations. Crises and the crisis communication process are extremely contextual and circumstantial.[4]

Also, Marra defined the weaknesses of case studies: "They are too time consuming, data reduction is difficult, reliability is suspect, procedures are not standardized, and they are difficult to use with large populations".[5] Nevertheless, this method is one of the best for a researcher who needs rich in-depth contextual information.

The research method used for this research is not pure case study, which is usually a combination of several different methods. In this particular work, the only method what will be applied is the content analysis of the brief case descriptions to find out what elements of crisis response were used and which of them worked best.

Such an approach has some advantages. The analysis takes less time then usual and, consequently, a larger number of cases can be analyzed. Since the task for analysis is quite simple, it is possible to standardize the procedures quite well and make the data reduction process easier.

There is a weakness of such an approach. Because of the lack of additional information, the researcher must rely on the information given in the files only. Designed for contests, that information may be one-sided and not objective.

The conference papers and the professional articles taken from the archives of PRSA and IABC are part of the second stage of the first phase of the research: the literature review. This material will help to make the scope of the study wider and to support or reject the previous findings.

For triangulation, 10 in-depth interviews with public relations practitioners working in Oklahoma were undertaken. The analysis of the interview results will be the second phase of the research. The in-depth interviews have almost the same advantages and disadvantages as the case studies. Since the PR practitioners interviewed mostly recounted the events of the different crises from their professional experience, this phase will allow a check of the conclusions made from the case studies in particular and from the whole first phase in general.

Such a complex methodological approach will provide many-sided views of the problem. Therefore, the final conclusions of the study will be based on the practical experience of real-world PR practitioners as well as on the scholarly literature. The recommendations for composition of the crisis communication guidelines will be grounded on the answers to the research questions.

Research Questions and Definitions

Research Questions

What are the common elements of crisis plans?

What are the basic elements of crisis response?

Definitions

The elements to examine are:

-The most important publics (media, employee, members, community, government, investors, consumers, special publics);

-The main methods of work (print, audiovisual, interpersonal, electronic, PR advertising, special events);

-The most used and effective channels of information (mass media in general, television, radio, print media, on-line services, telephone, direct mail, hand-outs, personal meetings, internal/employee media);

-The main and most effective PR tools (news releases, photographs, news conferences, media kits, radio/TV announcements, interviews, personal appearances of management on broadcast media, news tapes for radio, recorded telephone news, brochures, bulletins, videotapes, telephone calls, guided site tours, formal speeches, billboards and signs, internet postings, etc.)

-The sequence of steps or actions to take during a crisis;

-Time frames for all the stages of the crisis coping process;

-Necessary back-up that must be always available in case of emergency (research information about main audiences; equipment, premises, information about an organization and its management).

Sampling Plan

Physical Framework

For the first stage of the research (content analysis and case studies) the physical framework for the sample consists of the files from the archives of information centers of the Public Relations Society of America and International Association of Business Communicators. Whole files under the heading "Crisis Communication" were taken for analysis as they were composed by the summer of 1995.

The body of material consists of:

-19 real world crisis communication plans of major American companies;

-14 case studies (most of them are winners of or entrants for the major PR awards);

-four conference papers and presentations on crisis topics;

-16 articles analyzing the general crisis communication process as well as particular cases.

Material for the literature review consists of papers and articles from the associations' archives, books and articles from the library of Oklahoma State University, and several dissertations available through interlibrary loan service.

The sample for the second phase of the study (in-depth interviews) consists of public relations practitioners working in Oklahoma. The factor of accessibility and territorial proximity played a role in the process of selection of the sample of people for interviews.

There was another factor that affected the decision concerning the geographical area of attention for interviews. Files of the information centers of PRSA and IABC contain mostly plans and materials about PR practices of major companies located in major metropolitan areas. Any information on the practice of smaller firms is rare. That is why interviews are important supplements to the scope of the study.

More than 30 letters were sent to the members of the local chapters of PRSA in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. Only ten people responded. One person requested the list of questions and answered in writing. Nine people gave personal interviews in their offices. All the interviews were held during December 1995 and January 1996.

Overall, the above may be defined as a convenience sample drawn from a population of American PR practitioners.

Theoretical Framework

There are several different definitions of organizational crises. One of the most comprehensive ones was given by Herman, who suggested that a crisis may be defined by the attributes of **threat to central organizational goals, short decision time, and surprise.**[6] Such a definition is probably the best one for the purposes of this study. Nevertheless, it would be useful to look at other definitions of crisis.

Fink defined an organizational crisis as "an unstable time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending."[7] Linke defined an organizational crisis as "any abnormality of negative consequences intruding into the daily course of operations. It is usually a surprise. A crisis can kill, degrade the quality of living, reduce wealth, or diminish reputation."[8] Ford defined crisis simpler: "A 'crisis' is a situation exhibiting

two characteristics: threat and time pressure."[9] Mitroff, Shrivastava, and Udwadia

defined corporate crises as:

> Disasters precipitated by people, organizational structures, economics, and/or technology that cause extensive damage to human life and natural and social environments. They inevitably debilitate both the financial structure and the reputation of a large organization.[10]

Lesly, wrote:

> a crisis is a stage at which all future events affecting a person or organization will be determined. It is a major turning point resulting in permanent drastic change. If is far more critical than most issues or emergencies. Crises are of great importance, but they are rare.[11]

Pauchant considered crisis as:

> a cumulation of improbable events at the level of a subsystem, or at the level of a system as a whole that can potentially damage more than one unit and thus disrupts the present operation or the future of the system under study as well as affecting substantially all four-party victims, at the physical, psychological, and/or existential levels.[12]

But again, for the purpose of this study crisis will be defined according to

Herman as:

> A situation that threatens the high priority goals of the organization, restricts the amount of time available for response, and surprises decision makers by its occurrence thereby engendering a high level of stress.[13]

Usually, a crisis communication plan is a part of a crisis management plan. For

the purpose of this study the definition of crisis management given by Littlejohn was

chosen: "Crisis management provides an organization with a systematic, orderly

response to crisis situations."[14]

The same author has given one of the first and comprehensive classifications of organizational crises: energy shortage, economic downturns, corporate theft, fire, and natural disasters.[15]

Meyers identified nine types of business crises: crises in public perception, sudden market shifts, product failures, top management succession, crashes, industrial relations, hostile takeovers, adverse international events, and regulation and deregulation.[16] Mitroff groups crises according to their underlying structural similarity: breakdowns or defects in products, plants, packages, equipment and people; extreme anti-social acts directed at corporations, products, consumers, executives, employees and employees families; external economic attacks such as extortion, bribery, boycotts, and hostile takeovers; external information attacks such as copyright infringement, loss of information, counterfeiting, and rumors; and environmental accidents.[17] Muller suggested that crises may be strategic (failure in the market place), performance (failure to meet an organization's goals), and liquidity (failure to meet an organization's obligations).[18]

Besides that, some researchers divide crises into predictable and unpredictable[19], and controlled and uncontrolled[20]. According to these classifications, the Tylenol crisis might be considered as unpredictable and controlled, while the Union Carbide crisis would be predictable and uncontrolled.

An interesting classification was proposed by Mitroff, Shrivastava, and Udwadia.[21] They proposed a two-by-two matrix with two axes. One axis measures crises on a technical/economic to people/social/organizational continuum. The other axis measures crises on an internal to external continuum.

The most useful for this study will be the classification given by Linke. According to him crises may be: exploding (fire, accidents), immediate (environmental problems, government hearings), building (labor negotiations, layoffs), and continuing (drugs in the work place).[22]

Certainly, a crisis is not a one-moment event. It lasts for some time: it arises, develops, and ends. That is why Fink suggested a four-phase model of crises: prodromal phase (warning signals about impending crisis); acute phase ("the point of no return" where the actual damage occurs); chronic phase (clean-up stage); and resolution stage (return to normal operations).[23]

Focus of the Study

The first element which must be defined is what kind of crises will be used for analysis. It is quite clear that for coping with "building" and "continuing" crises special PR programs may be developed. In such cases PR practitioners have enough time to think things over, and make correct decisions. An emergency plan is not necessary here. Only in the case of "exploding" or "immediate" crises PR people really need an emergency plan that allows them to work almost automatically.

Crises which fall within this study may be defined in a traditional journalistic way, the way in which news is considered. The crises as well as news may be "hard" and "soft." Hard crises are industrial accidents, natural disasters, terrorist acts, and so forth. In a word, a crisis may defined as "hard" when journalists and people come to or call the organization to find out what happened. Soft crises are organizational restructuring, mergers, acquisitions, and so on. In these cases, the managers of an organization usually announce such crises themselves. Mostly, hard crises need well-written crisis plans. Soft crises may be predicted and carefully planned for ahead of time.

For this study, only crises without a warning stage will be considered.

According to Brody:

> *Crisis* is among the most misused words in the language of communication. A *crisis* is a decisive turning point in a condition or state of affairs. ... A *disaster* is an unfortunate sudden and unexpected event. Disasters occur through

carelessness, negligence, or bad judgment, or are produced by natural forces such as hurricanes or floods. ... An *emergency* is an unforeseen occurrence; a sudden and urgent occasion for action."[24*]

Thus, only "disaster" and "emergency" situations will be examined. Since disasters and emergency situations are unpredictable while crises may be foreseen, PR people need a well-written crisis communication plan to work with under disastrous and emergency circumstances.

Although many of the attributes may be very similar, common managerial personal crises such as accidental death, divorce, suicide of a loved one, disease or serious illness, marital or relationship stress, car accident, injury as a result of assault and battery[25] will not be under consideration in this study because they are not big enough to be included. They do not affect many people and do not affect dramatically an organization's activity.

What phase of crises will be examined? Mostly, it will be the "acute" stage. As it was already mentioned above, disaster or emergency crises do not have a warning phase. The "chronic" and "resolution" phases fall under the post-crisis communication category that is not within the scope of this study.

To avoid confusion, only so-called "business public relations" situations will be included in the research. "Political PR" is slightly different, it has some specific features that can affect the general logic of this study.

The size of crises (local, state, federal, or international) does not have a serious role in this research. But since most of the crises taken for analysis were major ones, conclusions and inferences will be made about the situations at the state level and above.

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* Emphasis in original text.

Finally, it is important to point out that although this research deals with planning for the future, it has nothing to do with strategic planning. Mostly, what will be analyzed and inferred will concern the tactical level of PR work.

Data Collection and Analysis

Phase One

Each type of material (crisis communication plans and PR cases) will be analyzed separately.

After the first reading, all the elements mentioned in the plans will be listed. After the second reading, only those elements that are stipulated in the majority of the plans will be highlighted. The whole process of content analysis will be done by the researcher himself.

The same two-step analysis will be applied to the public relations cases. All the elements mentioned as a part of the crisis coping process will be listed. Then, those that were used in the majority of the cases or clearly identified as the most effective ones will be picked out.

During the literature review analysis process, only those elements that were especially pointed out by the authors as the most effective or widespread will be chosen.

Phase Two

All the people participating in the interviews received the same list of questions before the interviews were held and had some time to prepare their answers. (List of questions: appendix) Most of the interviews were recorded on audio tapes with consent of the respondents. The analysis of the recordings will not be very difficult because people were well prepared, and usually were able to quite clearly define the most used and effective elements of the crisis coping process.

The final conclusions will be reached through a step-by-step process. The results of the content analysis and case studies will be checked by the literature review. Then, the conclusions of the first phase of the research will be combined with the inferences from the in-depth interviews.

Research Objectives

The main research objectives are to compile the lists of the most common elements of crisis communication plans and the most effective elements of the crisis coping process and then put them together in a logical way to create crisis communication guidelines. Those guidelines may be used as a basis for designing crisis plans as well as the general directions for the PR staff in case of emergency. They should be so detailed that even an inexperienced PR person being guided by them would be able to do the right thing at the right time.

Assumptions and Limitations

There are several limitations that must be noted.

First of all, the number of analyzed crisis communication plans are limited by those contained in the information centers of PRSA and IABC in the summer of 1995. Most of the plans analyzed for this study are not the latest versions: most of them have been already revised by the companies.

The same problem concerns the PR cases. Most of them are several years old. Nevertheless, they should give valuable information about basic crisis response elements.

The literature covering crisis communication is dynamic. Certainly, some publications will not be included into the literature review because it is impossible to examine everything published.

The main reservation for the in-depth interviews concerns the fact that all of them were conducted in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. This territorial limitation is quite important in terms of generalizing the results of the study.

Mostly, "exploding" or "immediate" hard crises will be taken into consideration in this research. It means that only situations that may be called a disaster or emergency will be analyzed.

The main focus will be on the so called "acute" stage of crises.

Only business or corporate public relations will be considered in this study. Political PR is not within the scope of the research.

It is important to note that only American PR practices will be explored. It is necessary to be very careful about transferring this experience to foreign soil.

Also, the facts that all the steps of the research will be done by the researcher himself and that no statistical procedure will be used for the data analysis may be noted as methodological limitations.

Finally, it is appropriate to note that things in the PR world change very rapidly. Information center files will be replenished, new crises will happen, new plans will be written, new books and articles will be published, public relations practitioners will acquire new crisis experience. And all the above mentioned must be taken into account for the future crisis response plans.

ENDNOTES

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[5] Ibid., 69.

[6] C.F. Hermann, "Some consequences of crises which limit the viability of organizations," <u>Administrative Science Quarterly</u> Vol.8, No.1 (June 1963): 61-82; quoted in Joanne Elaine Hurd, "Crisis Response Tools: A Layered Model of Communication Support" (Ph.D. diss, Texas Technical University, 1992), 3.

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[17] I.I. Mitroff, <u>Break-Away Thinking: How to Challenge Your Business Assumptions (And Why You Should)</u> (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1988).

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[22] C.G. Linke, "Crisis Dealing with the Unexpected," in <u>Expert in Action: Inside Public Relations</u>, ed. B. Cantor and C. Burger (New York, NY: Longman, 1989), 166-178.

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CHAPTER III

STAGE ONE OF PHASE ONE:

CRISIS PLANS AND CASE STUDIES

(Findings and Analysis)

This chapter will present the findings of the first stage of phase one of the research that, in turn, consists of two parts. Part one is a content analysis of real world crisis response plans. The second part is an examination of crisis communication case studies. The main aim of this stage of the study is to find the common elements of crisis plans and the basic elements of crisis response.

Findings of Content Analysis of Crisis Plans

For this part of the study, 19 real world crisis communication plans were analyzed. Not all of them are called "plans." Some of them have other titles, for example, such as "guidelines," "handbook," "manual," or "policy." They are very different in terms of length, extent of details indicated, and approaches used. Nevertheless, all of them were designed to provide instructions for the companies' staffs in case of emergency. The following is an analysis of all 19 plans one by one.

PRSA Archives

Although the document written by Jiffy Lube's Chicago ADI Coop is called "crisis management plan"[1], it better fits the category of crisis press relations guidelines because it is the only area that it deals with. The plan takes up just two single-spaced

pages. The only situation under consideration is when a reporter, photographer or camera crew arrives at a company store. No particular reason for such an occasion is stipulated. The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics. The only public that is taken into account is media representatives.

Methods of work. Only interpersonal communication is stipulated in the plan.

Channels of information. Only telephone is mentioned in the plan for all possible communication needs. It is to be used for notifying the company's management and PR agent as well as for all negotiations with the press representatives.

PR tools. Again, only phone calls to the media are mentioned in the plan.

Sequence of steps.
1) Politely talk to journalists.
2) Notify company's management.
3) Notify company's PR agent.

Time frames. According to the plan all the actions must be taken "at once."

Necessary back-up. According to the plan, a list of telephone numbers of members of crisis management committee of the company (home as well as work) must be always available to any employee in case of emergency.

Although the next document is not clearly identified as a plan or guidelines, it is closer to being a plan than something else because it is quite large (11 single-spaced

pages) and detailed. It has a special title: "Project Going Home."[2] It was created in case of the unexpected death of Danny Thomas, President of ALSAC and Founder of St. Jude's Children Research Hospital. The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics. The most important publics were not clearly and explicitly identified in the plan. However, after analysis of the plan's text, it is possible to name the publics that most of the work should be directed to:

    1) Mass media.

    2) ALSAC and St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital's employees (all levels).

    3) donors to the Danny Thomas Endowment Fund.

Methods of work.   1) Print.

    2) Audiovisual.

    3) PR advertising.

Channels of information.   1) Mass media (special types are not specified).

    2) Direct mail.

    3) Telephone (through the company's switchboard).

    4) Internal employee media.

PR tools.   1) Press release.

    2) B-roll video.

    3) News conference.

    4) Internal newsletter (special issue of *ALSAC News*).

Sequence of steps.   1) Notification of all the employees.

2) Decoration of all the company's buildings with black bunting and mourning wreaths.

3) Notification of mass media.

4) Notification of important outside publics (such as donors).

5) Establishing a news center for media.

Time frames.   No special time frames are stipulated.

Necessary back-up.   1) Fact sheet on the company.

2) "Ready-to-go" texts of the first official statement and first press release.

The document designed by Lone Star Gas Company is called an "emergency preparedness plan."[3] Nevertheless, it is general guidelines rather than a plan. It was designed in case of physical or non-physical incidents serious enough to significantly affect the company's reputation. The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.   1) Civic leaders.

2) Mass Media.

3) Financial media should be dealt with separately.

4) General public.

5) Company's employees.

Methods of work.   Not clear.

Channels of information.   Mass media (special types are not specified).

PR tools.   Only a press release was mentioned.

Sequence of steps.	1) Define scope of problem and notify senior management.
	2) Establish special Company Team.
	3) Establish Communications Policy Center (headquarters).
	4) Establish Information Center (for communicating with all the main audiences except for media).
	5) Establish Media Center (for communicating with mass media).
Time frames.	Not specified.
Necessary back-up.	1) Lists of contacts, mailing addresses, and phone numbers of key representatives of the most important audiences.
	2) Transportation means.
	3) Equipment for Emergency Control Center: desks, chairs, filing cabinets, copy machine, waste baskets, three to nine telephones each capable of long distance communication, typewriters or computers, FAX machine, television set, VCR, battery operated radio, office supplies.
	4) Media training is highlighted as a very important part for crisis preparation.

The document designed by ICP Pittsburgh and International Cycling Productions is called "crisis communication policy" and provides general guidelines in

case of an emergency during bicycle races in Pittsburgh.[4] The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.   Mass media.

Methods of work.   Interpersonal.

Channels of information.   Mass media (special types are not specified).

PR tools   1) Media Statement.

2) Updated media reports.

3) News interviews.

4) News conferences.

Sequence of steps.   1) Inform and convene Crisis Response Team.

2) Review the situation.

3) Select appropriate spokesperson and disseminate statements.

4) Establish news room.

5) Gather information and update written statements.

6) Set up news interviews and conferences.

7) Monitor news coverage.

Time frames.   Not specified.

Necessary back up.   According to the plan, it is always necessary to have approval by management for the first media statement.

The next sample crisis communication plan was designed by the PR staff of a division of Hameroff/Milenthal/Spence company as a basis for future more detailed crisis plans.[5] It is very general because it takes into account all possible types of crises

that can happen to the company. The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	1) According to the plan, employees are very important.
	2) Local community publics are second in importance.
	3) Mass media.
	4) Political leaders.
	5) Regulatory agencies.
Methods of work.	1) Interpersonal.
	2) Print.
	3) PR advertising.
Channels of information.	1) Telephone.
	2) Mass media (special types are not specified).
	3) Personal meetings.
PR tools.	1) PR articles.
	2) Personal interviews.
	3) Toll-free number staffed 24 hours a day.
	4) Press conferences.
	5) Personal appearance of management on broadcast media.
Sequence of steps.	This part is not clearly elaborated.
Time frames.	According to the plan, everything must be done immediately.
Necessary back up.	1) List of crisis team members.
	2) Crisis plans for the most probable types of crises.

3) Backgrounders and articles on company and
its products.
4) Experts available to assists/act as
spokespersons.
5) Media contact list.
6) Location to hold press conferences.
7) Well-trained spokesperson and members of
the crisis team. (According to the plan, media
training is very important.)

The next crisis plan was designed by Coors for one single event: the 1994 Coors "Literacy. Pass it on" event.[6] This event was so important for the Coors that the management decided to create a special plan to cope with all possible kinds of crises that might happen during the event. The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics. 1) Event guests and participants.

2) Mass media.

Methods of work. 1) Print.

2) Audiovisual.

3) Interpersonal.

Channels of information. 1) Mass media (special types are not specified).

2) Telephone.

PR tools. 1) Personal announcements for guests and
participants in the event.

2) Press statements disseminated through FAX.

3) B-roll.

4) Phone calls.

	5) Media blitz.
Sequence of steps.	There are many scenarios proposed and all of them are very different in terms of the sequence of necessary PR steps.
Time frames.	It was not elaborated for any of the proposed scenarios.
Necessary back-up.	Location for the media contact center.

The plan designed for British Petroleum company occupies more than 20 single-spaced pages and discusses mostly psychological or theoretical aspects of crisis communication.[7] Nevertheless, there are some technical elements that may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	1) Mass media.
	2) Affected communities.
	3) Oversight groups.
	4) Employees.
	5) Regulators.
	6) Legislators.
	7) Shareholders.
Methods of work.	1) Print.
	2) Audiovisual.
	3) Interpersonal.
Channels of information.	1) Television.
	2) Print media.
PR tools.	1) Press conference.
	2) Speech or written official statement.
	3) Personal interviews.

<u>Sequence of steps</u>.	This aspect is not elaborated.
<u>Time frames</u>.	1) Press conference opening statement must be no longer than 60-90 seconds.
	2) A 2 p.m. news conference will satisfy most needs of the evening newscasts of TV and radio, as well as the morning newspapers.
	3) A 10 a.m. news conference will satisfy the requirements of afternoon newspapers, as well as TV and radio.
<u>Necessary back-up</u>.	1) The company's annual report is the best choice because it contains all the necessary information about the company.
	2) Detailed crisis communication plan.
	3) Training is absolutely necessary pre-condition for successful work during a crisis.

The document designed for Circle Line company is a crisis communication plan overview. That may be why it is not very detailed.[8] The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

<u>The most important publics</u>.	Only mass media is mentioned as a public to deal with.
<u>Methods of work</u>.	1) Printed.
	2) Interpersonal.
<u>Channels of information</u>.	1) Mass media (special types are not specified).
	2) Telephone.
<u>PR tools</u>.	1) Telephone calls.
	2) Press release.

	3) Official statement for the media representatives.
	4) News conference.
Sequence of steps.	1) Inform appropriate rescue, law enforcement, fire or medical facilities.
	2) Notify the company's PR agent.
	3) Inform families of involved people.
	4) Arrange necessary transportation means.
	5) Instruct switchboard personnel to refer media calls to a designated office.
	6) Notify the official company spokesperson.
	7) Establish a press room.
	8) Issue an official statement.
	9) After management approval, issue a press release.
Time frames.	According to the plan, everything must be done immediately.
Necessary back-up.	1) Samples of emergency press release and official statement.
	2) Media training sessions are absolutely necessary.
	3) Keep all appropriate inspection reports, permits, and certificates.
	4) A solid emergency fund.

The next document was designed by the administration of the Hilton Hotel especially for the convention of the American Health Care Association (AHCA) in Las

Vegas.[9] Expecting that an organization called American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today (ADAPT) would try to make an effort to disrupt the AHCA's convention, the administration created the document that is more a set of instructions for the hotel's employees than a crisis communication plan. However, the following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	1) Hotel employees.
	2) Hotel guests.
Methods of work.	1) Interpersonal.
	2) Print.
Channels of information.	Internal employee media.
PR tools.	1) Printed instructions for employees.
	2) Printed letters for hotel guests.
Sequence of steps.	Not specified.
Time frames.	Not specified.
Necessary back-up.	Always have a designated spokesperson available.

IABC Archives

The next crisis communication plan was created by the United Services Automobile Association for all possible types of crises.[10] The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	1) Mass media.
	2) Members/customers.
	3) Employees.
Methods of work.	1) Print.
	2) Audiovisual.

	3) Interpersonal.
	4) PR advertising.
Channels of information.	1) Mass media (special types are not specified).
	2) Telephone.
PR tools.	1) Press conferences and briefings.
	2) Radio/TV announcements.
	3) Public speeches.
	4) Personal visits.
	5) Employee briefings.
	6) News release.
	7) Recorded telephone news.
	8) Leaflets.
	9) Posters.
	10) Newspaper advertisements.
Sequence of steps.	Not clear.
Time frames.	Not specified.
Necessary back-up.	At the end of the plan, there is a list of necessary

things to consider in case of an emergency. The list includes more than one hundred items. For example:

1) Designated location for media center.

2) Transportation.

3) Communication equipment.

4) Office equipment and supplies.

5) Company's background documents with

maps, photographs, diagrams, charts,

videotapes, etc.

6) Regulations, laws, guides.

7) Power sources (generators, batteries, etc.).

The document designed by Allergan company is supposed to be a comprehensive one.[11] It contains general theoretical as well as specific technical points. The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics. 1) The affected party or parties.

2) Customer/consumer.

3) Company's employees.

4) The local communities in which the

company operates.

5) Shareholders.

6) Suppliers.

7) Government officials/agencies.

8) Security analysts.

9) Mass media.

Methods of work. 1) Print.

2) Interpersonal.

Channels of information. Mass media (special types are not specified).

PR tools. 1) Official statements.

2) Personal interviews.

3) Press releases.

4) Bulletins.

Sequence of steps. Not clear.

Time frames. Not specified.

Necessary back-up. 1) Sample of the first crisis statement.

2) Spokesperson should be always ready.

3) Media training should be conducted often.

The next plan was designed by C&P Telephone company to establish procedures for lines of communications, interaction with the media and action for resolving a crisis of any nature.[12] The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

<u>The most important publics</u>.	1) Mass media.
	2) Government agencies.
	3) Employees
	4) General public.
<u>Methods of work</u>.	1) Print.
	2) Interpersonal.
<u>PR tools</u>.	1) Official statement.
	2) Press release.
	3) 24-hour toll-free telephone line.
	4) Media briefing.
	5) Press kit.
<u>Channels of information</u>..	1) Mass media (special types are not specified).
	2) Telephone.
<u>Sequence of steps</u>.	1) Establish crisis communication team.
	2) Identify the crisis.
	3) Notify management.
	4) Establish media response team.
	5) Assign spokesperson.
	6) Establish company command post.
	7) Establish media briefing room.
	8) Notify general public and employees.
	9) Notify everybody when the crisis is resolved.

	10) Evaluate company's crisis performance.
Time frames.	Not specified.
Necessary back-up.	1) Semi-annual crisis communication role playing sessions.
	2) Equipment for media room and command center.

The document designed by National Medical Enterprises company contains suggestions on how to develop a crisis communication plan and also a sample of the plan itself.[13] The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	1) Mass media.
	2) Families of victims.
	3) Employees.
Methods of work.	1) Print.
	2) Interpersonal.
	3) Visual.
Channels of information.	1) Mass media (special types are not specified).
	2) Telephone.
PR tools.	1) Press release.
	2) Special phone lines.
	3) Personal interviews.
	4) Photographs.
	5) Media statements or briefings.
	6) Employee newsletter.
Sequence of steps.	1) Make proper notifications.
	2) Establish media room.
	3) Issue statement or press release.

4) Notify victims families.

5) Establish special phone lines.

6) Give appropriate instructions to clerical personnel.

7) Coordinate outgoing messages.

Time frames.　　　　　　Not specified.

Necessary back-up.　　　1) Telephones.

2) Equipment for media room.

Other Plans

The document designed by Phillips Petroleum company is one of the most recent plans.[14] It was approved in July of 1995. The plan itself is not very long: just 12 pages. In addition to that it has 24 pages of "Quick Reference Directory of Domestic & International Key Facilities." The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.　1) Mass media.

2) Company's employees.

3) State authorities.

4) Federal government.

5) Affected communities.

6) Investors.

Methods of work.　　　　1) Audiovisual.

2) Print.

3) Interpersonal.

Channels of information.　1) Television is especially important.

2) Print media.

	3) Telephone.
PR tools.	1) Press release.
	2) Press conferences.
	3) Personal interviews.
	4) Photo opportunities.
	5) Media kits.
	6) Video tapes.
	7) Guided site tours.
	8) Special phone lines.
Sequence of steps.	1) Notify staff.
	2) Prepare initial statement.
	3) Work with media requests.
Time frames.	Not specified.
Necessary back-up.	1) Technical equipment.
	2) Emergency plan.
	3) Well-trained personnel.
	4) Visual aid.

The next document was prepared by the Travel Industry Association of America as a guide for its members.[15] The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	1) Mass media.
	2) Employees.
	3) Customers.
Methods of work.	1) Interpersonal.
	2) Print.
	3) PR advertising.

<u>Channels of information.</u>	1) Mass media (special types are not specified).
	2) Telephone.
<u>PR tools.</u>	1) Telephone calls.
	2) Media briefings.
	3) Personal interviews.
	4) Backgrounders.
<u>Sequence of steps.</u>	1) Establish emergency phone lines.
	2) Establish information center.
	3) Establish easy fact finding procedures.
	4) Cancel or change advertising.
	5) Conduct media briefing.
	6) Arrange employee/guest media interviews.
	7) Notify all necessary people.
	8) Distribute background information.
<u>Time frames.</u>	Not specified.
<u>Necessary back-up.</u>	1) Crisis plan.
	2) Media training.
	3) Technical equipment.
	4) Company's background information.

The next document is the most recent one. It is a set of general guidelines prepared by Kerr-McGee, a large oil company, in August of 1995.[16] The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

<u>The most important publics.</u>	Mass media is the only type of public mentioned in the plan.
<u>Methods of work.</u>	1) Interpersonal.
	2) Print.

Channels of information.	Mass media (special types are not specified).
PR tools.	1) Press release.
	2) Official press statement.
Sequence of steps.	1) Get the facts.
	2) Develop message.
	3) Clear the message with management.
	4) Handle press inquiries.
	5) Provide updates.
Time frames.	Not specified.
Necessary back-up.	1) Samples of statements.
	2) Fact sheets.
	3) Contact lists.

The document designed by Oklahoma Natural Gas company is a brief guide for handling media contacts in case of an emergency.[17] The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	Mass media is the only type of public mentioned in the plan.
Methods of work.	Interpersonal.
Channels of information.	1) Television.
	2) Newspapers.
PR tools.	Personal interview.
Sequence of steps.	Not specified.
Time frames.	Not specified.
Necessary back-up.	Text of the media statement.

The next document was designed by Express Personnel Service, a company working in the temporary personnel hiring area and it was to be implemented in case of death or injury of a temporary employee.[18] The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	1) Mass media.
	2) Employees.
Methods of work.	Interpersonal.
Channels of information.	Mass media (special types are not specified).
PR tools.	1) Media statement.
	2) Photographs.
	3) Personal interviews.
Sequence of steps.	1) Contact company's headquarters.
	2) Appoint one spokesperson.
	3) Issue media statement.
	4) Notify family members.
	5) Keep employees informed.
	6) Update the media.
Time frames.	It is not clearly specified. (Everything must be done immediately.)
Necessary back-up.	Sample emergency message.

The document designed by the Tulsa Hospital Council is also a short set of guidelines for hospital personnel in case of an emergency.[19] The following elements may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	Mass media.
Methods of work.	Interpersonal.
Channels of information.	Mass media (special types are not specified).

PR tools.	1) Photographs.
	2) Interviews.
Sequence of steps.	Not specified.
Time frames.	Not specified.
Necessary back-up.	Not specified.

Findings of Case Studies

For this part of the study, 14 real world crisis communication cases were analyzed. Thirteen of them were entries for or winners of major PR awards (Silver Anvil and Gold Quill). The following is the analysis of all 14 case studies one by one.

PRSA Archives

On April 29, 1992, the worst civil unrest ever recorded in the United States during the 20th Century occurred in Los Angeles. It resulted in multi-million dollar losses for the tourist business. The Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau designed a program to help this situation. The program was quite successful. For example, of the 54 conventions booked before the unrest, only one group canceled its meeting in Los Angeles as a result of the riots.[20] The following elements of the program may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	1) Visitors.
	2) Bureau members.
	3) Mass media.
	4) International tour operators.
	5) Convention planners.
Methods of work.	1) Interpersonal.
	2) Print.

	3) Audiovisual.
Channels of information.	1) Mass media (special types are not specified).
	2) Telephone.
	3) Direct mail.
PR tools.	1) Multi-lingual visitor information telephone hot line.
	2) Briefings.
	3) Press conferences.
	4) Individual interviews.
	5) Set of promotional materials for direct mail.
	6) Video film.
Sequence of steps.	Not clear.
Time frames.	Not clear.
Necessary back-up.	Not specified.

The United Way of Richmond/Southside needed to stop area residents from eliminating or reducing their 1992 contribution to the local United Way in reaction to the scandal involving abuses by United Way of America President William Aramony. The United Way of America of Richmond/Southside designed the program to help this situation. The program was quite successful. For example, the United Way Richmond/Southside achieved a four percent increase over its 1991 campaign total - one of the largest increases nationwide.[21] The following elements of the program may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	1) Mass media.
	2) General public.
Methods of work.	1) Interpersonal.
	2) Print.

3) Audiovisual.

4) Special event.

Channels of information.   1) Mass media (television, radio, and print

media were used equally).

2) Telephone.

3) Direct mail.

PR tools.   1) PR articles.

2) Letters.

3) Volunteer Response phone lines.

4) Press conferences.

5) Personal meetings with media managers.

6) A half-hour PR TV program.

7) PR video film.

8) Special "kickoff" event.

9) Media contacts with various story ideas.

10) Party celebrating end of the program.

Sequence of steps.   Not clear.

Time frames.   Not specified.

Necessary back-up.   Not clear.

On September 12, 1994, a German tourist aboard Circle Line's 11:30 a.m. cruise was shot by a sniper located on shore. Media inquiries began almost immediately. The company took immediate action to help this situation. The actions were successful. For example, Circle Line business increased significantly for several weeks following the incident. Not one story cited Circle Line negatively for any actions.[22] The following elements of this case may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.   1) Mass media.

	2) Tourists.
Methods of work.	Interpersonal.
Channels of information.	Mass media (radio was the main one).
PR tools.	1) Company president's news conference.
	2) Company officials' personal address to the tourists.
	3) Key company executives' radio interviews.
Sequence of steps.	1) Company president's news conference.
	2) Personal address to the tourists.
	3) News conference with the city mayor.
	4) Key company executives' radio interviews.
Time frames.	The first company president's news conference was held before broadcast deadlines.
Necessary back-up.	The president was media trained.

Approximately 90 days before the American Health Care Association (AHCA) annual meeting was scheduled to be held at the Las Vegas Hilton Hotel and the adjacent Las Vegas Convention Center, authorities notified the hotel that during the past three AHCA annual meetings, more than 300 people had been arrested and a number of officers and activists had been injured during violent demonstrations staged by the group American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today (ADAPT). The administration of Las Vegas Hilton hotel and Cohn & Wolfe Company designed the program for the purpose to help this situation. The program was quite successful. For example, although the AHCA meeting was held with civil protests by the ADAPT group, no serious injuries were reported and the Las Vegas Hilton was not featured in any coverage of the demonstrations.[23] The following elements of the program may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	1) Hotel employees.
	2) Hotel guests.
	3) Mass media.
Methods of work.	1) Interpersonal.
	2) Print.
Channels of information.	1) Internal employee news media.
	2) Mass media (special types are not specified).
	3) Print.
PR tools.	1) Employee news letter.
	2) Management briefings.
	3) Staff meetings.
	4) Letter to the guests.
	5) Local media briefings.
Sequence of steps.	1) Work with the employees and management.
	2) Letters to the guests.
	3) Work with mass media.
Time frames.	Not specified.
Necessary back-up.	Contingency statements focusing on likely scenarios must be always ready.

The Denny's restaurant hostage crisis on May 23, 1994, began a five-month process that culminated in the successful reopening of the restaurant, improved community and media relations in Indianapolis, and a major sales increase at the restaurant that was taken hostage.[24] The following elements of the case may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	1) Customers.
	2) Survivors and their families.

	3) Community leaders.
	4) Mass media.
Methods of work.	1) Interpersonal.
	2) Special event.
Channels of information.	Mass media (special types are not specified).
PR tools.	1) News conference.
	2) Personal visits.
	3) TV interview of the company's president.
	4) Reopening event.
Sequence of steps.	1) Initial news conference.
	2) Company's president visited the wounded manager and was interviewed by a TV reporter.
	3) City mayor's press conference (where the reopening was announced).
	4) Reopening event.
Time frames.	Not specified.
Necessary back-up.	Not clear.

Just weeks before Robert Redford's hit movie, "Quiz Show", was released, the management of Geritol company was informed that their product would play a prominent, and very negative role in the movie. Within 24 hours a crisis plan was developed, approved and implementation started. The company's actions were successful. While the management feared declining sales because of the movie, sales actually increased during the two-month period following the movie release.[25] The following elements of the case may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics. 1) Women and men - 30-60 years.

	2) Consumer media.
Methods of work.	1) Special event.
	2) Print.
	3) Audiovisual.
Channels of information.	Mass media (special types are not specified).
PR tools.	1) National survey.
	2) Press/media statement/release.
	3) Media kit.
	4) B-Roll.
	5) Movie premiere event.
Sequence of steps.	1) National survey.
	2) Statement, media kit, and B-roll about the survey.
	3) Movie premiere event.
Time frames.	Not clear.
Necessary back-up.	Media training was conducted for the company's managers.

In January 1993, several children fell ill from eating undercooked hamburgers. That became a major crisis for the National Livestock and Meat Board. The Board swiftly designed a crisis program and implemented it. The program was quite successful. Beef consumption has actually risen in 1993 and 1994.[26] The following elements of the program may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	All Americans concerned about food safety.
Methods of work.	Print.
Channels of information.	Direct mail.
PR tools.	1) "Safe Food Backgrounder."
	2) "Crisis Communication Press Kit."

3) "Health Kit."

4) Consumer brochure.

Sequence of steps.	Not explained.
Time frames.	Not specified.
Necessary back-up.	Not clear.

Three teenagers were wounded and one killed in Daytona Beach, Florida, during a Taco Bell robbery in 1992. That was a major crisis for the company. The crisis response actions began immediately. According to the opinions of the specialists, the actions were successful.[27] The following elements of the case may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	1) Parents.
	2) Schools.
	3) Police.
	4) Mass media.
	5) Community.
Methods of work.	Interpersonal.
Channels of information.	Mass media (special types are not specified).
PR tools.	1) News conference.
	2) Media statement.
Sequence of steps.	1) The company paid all funeral expenses for Michelle Van Ness (the killed girl).
	2) The company paid medical bills of those hospitalized.
	3) The company established scholarship in Van Ness' name.
	4) The company offered counseling to schools.

5) Taco Bell restaurant was decorated with the mourning decorations.

6) News conference was held.

7) Statement was released.

Time frames.   All the actions were undertaken immediately after the incident.

Necessary back-up.   It is necessary to have a solid emergency fund to be able to pay some expenses.

On June 10, 1993, a Seattle television station reported that a local couple had discovered a syringe in a can of Diet Pepsi. Soon, a second complaint in Seattle surfaced. The Pepsi company responded immediately. The crisis coping actions were successful; the company ended the season with its highest sales in five years.[28] The following elements of the case may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.   1) General public.

2) Mass media.

Methods of work.   1) Interpersonal.

2) Print.

3) Audiovisual.

Channels of information.   1) Television.

2) Other mass media.

3) Telephone.

4) Internal employee media.

PR tools.   1) On-site interviews.

2) Plant guided tours.

3) Press release.

4) Video news release.

5) Consumer talking points.

6) Employee bulletins.

7) Trade letters.

8) Still photos and graphs.

9) Personal CEO's appearance on TV.

10) Special toll-free telephone lines for press and people.

Sequence of steps.	Everything was done simultaneously.
Time frames.	The crisis lasted seven days.
Necessary back-up.	Not clear.

In April of 1993, a German tourist was killed in Miami. After that, Alamo car rental company started a special safety PR program. According to the opinions of the specialists, the program was very popular and successful.[29] The following elements of the program may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.	The company's customers.
Methods of work.	Print.
Channels of information.	Hand-out.
PR tools.	"Customer Safety Alert" (safety guidelines leaflet).
Sequence of steps.	Not relevant.
Time frames.	The document was created just for five days.
Necessary back-up.	Company's statistical data concerning the causes of different emergency situations.

Hurricane Andrew struck south Florida in the pre-dawn hours of August 24, 1992. Millions of people lost electrical power. Florida Power and Light company

responded immediately according to its crisis communication plan. The response was successful. Post hurricane surveys show satisfaction with the company increased by 20 percent.[30] The following elements of the case may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics. 1) General public.

2) Mass media.

3) Employees.

4) Shareholders.

5) Financial analysts and portfolio managers.

6) Federal, state, and local government officials.

Methods of work. 1) Print.

2) Interpersonal.

3) Audiovisual.

4) PR advertising.

Channels of information. 1) Mass media (special types are not specified).

2) Internal employee media.

3) Telephone.

4) Direct mail.

PR tools. 1) Media calls.

2) Executive news briefings.

3) Press releases.

4) Company backgrounders.

5) Photo opportunities.

6) Guided media tours.

7) Crew interviews.

8) Daily briefing videos.

9) CEO teleconferences.

10) Letters to shareholders.

11) Advertisements.

12) Employee television shows.

13) Employee publications.

14) Status reports to the government officials.

Sequence of steps.   Not clear.

Time frames.   Not specified.

Necessary back-up.   1) It is important to have a crisis plan.

2) It is necessary in Florida to have people available who speak English and Spanish.

IABC Archives

Right after hurricane Andrew struck Florida, there were a lot of attacks on insurance companies that did not respond quickly and properly to the needs of people who suffered from the consequences of the hurricane. The insurance company called United Service Automobile Association perceived this situation as a major crisis and, simultaneously, a great opportunity. The chief communication officer and property and casualty marketing division of the company designed a special crisis communication program and implemented it immediately. The program was quite successful: over 100 laudatory letters were received praising communications and services.[31] The following elements of the program may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

The most important publics.   1) Mass media.

2) Employees.

3) Customers.

Methods of work.   1) Interpersonal.

	2) Audiovisual.
	3) Print.
Channels of information.	1) Mass media (special types are not specified).
	2) Employee media.
	3) Employee meetings.
	4) Direct mail.
PR tools.	1) Personal meetings.
	2) Employee publications.
	3) Customers news letters.
	4) Training video documentary for employees.
Sequence of steps.	The first step was formation of a catastrophe team's "CAT Kit" (laptop computer, flashlight, cellular phone, etc.).
Time frames.	Not clear.
Necessary back-up.	1) It is always necessary to have a crisis plan.
	2) It is important to have equipment for "CAT Kit."

C&P Telephone's customers in Washington, DC, may be among the most influential people in the world. For example, the company provides telecommunication services to the U.S. President, U.S. Congress, U.S. Supreme Court, and other government institutions. When a crisis occurs it is important that the company is perceived by its customers and regulators as competent and reliable. The crisis communication plan was designed to help maintain a positive company image for its customers. During the June 26 crisis, C&P Telephone company had a chance to test the plan. The efforts were quite successful; 82 percent of the articles/newscasts devoted to

the crisis were fair to the company and balanced.[32] The following elements of the case may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

<u>The most important publics.</u> Mass media

<u>Methods of work.</u>

1) Print.

2) Interpersonal.

<u>Channels of information.</u>

1) Mass media (special types are not specified).

2) Telephone.

<u>PR tools.</u>

1) Press conference.

2) Press briefings.

3) Press releases.

4) Press calls.

5) Telephone interviews.

6) TV interviews.

<u>Sequence of steps.</u> Not clear.

<u>Time frames.</u> Not specified.

<u>Necessary back-up.</u> It is always necessary to have a crisis plan.

<u>Case provided by the company itself</u>

Oklahoma Gas and Electric Company is a major provider of electrical power for many Oklahoma residents. On July 24, 1995, a very strong storm struck Oklahoma. More than 40,000 people lost electrical power. The company responded immediately and activated its crisis communication plan. Officials of the company judged communication efforts during the crisis as successful.[33] The following elements of the case may be pointed out for the purpose of the study.

<u>The most important publics.</u> Mass media.

<u>Methods of work.</u> 1) Interpersonal.

	2) Print.
	3) PR advertising.
Channels of information.	1) Mass media (TV is the main one).
	2) Telephone.
PR tools.	1) Media calls.
	2) Telephone interviews.
	3) Live TV broadcasts from company's emergency headquarters.
	4) Briefings.
	5) Media interviews on crew locations.
	6) Press release.
	7) Newspaper PR advertisement.
Sequence of steps.	Everything was going spontaneously.
Time frames.	The crisis response lasted one week.
Necessary back-up.	The crisis communication plan must be always ready.

Summary

The following tables summarize the results of content analysis of the crisis communication plans and case studies.

The following symbols are used:

N stands for number of crisis plans, case studies, or all analyzed documents together that mentioned a particular item.

% stands for percentage of crisis plans, case studies, or all analyzed documents together that mentioned a particular item.

The most important publics

TABLE I

TYPES OF PUBLICS MENTIONED AS VERY IMPORTANT IN CRISIS PLANS
AND CASE STUDIES
(Number of Documents Analyzed: Crisis Plans - 19; Case Studies - 14; Overall - 33)

Publics Mentioned	Crisis Plans		Case Studies		Overall	
	N_1	%	N_2	%	N_3	%
Mass Media	18	94.7	11	78.5	29	87.8
Employee/ Members	13	68.4	4	28.5	17	51.5
Government	4	21.0	1	7.1	5	15.1
Community	3	15.8	1	7.1	4	12.1
Investors/ Donors/ Shareholders	4	21.0	1	7.1	5	15.1
Customers/ Consumers /Guests	4	21.0	6	42.8	10	30.3
Special Publics	2	10.5	3	21.4	5	15.1
General Publics	2	10.5	4	28.5	6	18.2
Special Media	1	5.2	1	7.1	2	6
Civic/Group/ Political Leaders	2	10.5	1	7.1	3	9

Publics	Crisis Plans		Case Studies		Overall	
Mentioned	N_1	%	N_2	%	N_3	%
Legislators/ Regulators	3	15.8	0	0	3	9
Affected People	4	21.0	1	7.1	5	15.1
Partners	1	5.2	1	7.1	2	6

The table shows that three types of public are mentioned most often as very important in the analyzed documents:

1) Mass media;

2) Employees/Members;

3) Customers/Consumers/Guests.

Methods of work

TABLE II

METHODS OF WORK MENTIONED IN CRISIS PLANS AND CASE STUDIES
(Number of Documents Analyzed: Crisis Plans - 19; Case Studies - 14; Overall - 33)

Methods of	Crisis Plans		Case Studies		Overall	
Work	N_1	%	N_2	%	N_3	%
Print	13	68.4	11	78.5	24	72.7
Audiovisual	6	31.5	6	42.8	12	36.3
Interpersonal	17	89.4	11	78.5	28	84.8
PR- Advertising	4	21.0	2	14.3	6	18.1

Methods of Work	Crisis Plans		Case Studies		Overall	
	N_1	%	N_2	%	N_3	%
Special Events	0	0	3	21.4	3	9.0
Electronic	0	0	0	0	0	0

The table shows that three methods of PR work are mentioned most often:

1) Interpersonal;

2) Print;

3) Audiovisual.

Channels of Information.

TABLE III

CHANNELS OF INFORMATION MENTIONED IN CRISIS PLANS AND CASE STUDIES
(Number of Documents Analyzed: Crisis Plans - 19; Case Studies - 14; Overall - 33)

Channels of Information	Crisis Plans		Case Studies		Overall	
	N_1	%	N_2	%	N_3	%
Mass Media (in general)	14	73.6	12	85.7	26	78.7
Television (specifically)	3	15.7	2	14.2	5	15.1
Radio (specifically)	0	0	1	7.1	1	3
Print Media (specifically)	3	15.7	1	7.1	4	12.1
On-Line Services	0	0	0	0	0	0

Channels of Information	Crisis Plans		Case Studies		Overall	
	N_1	%	N_2	%	N_3	%
Hand-Out	0	0	1	7.1	1	3
Telephone	10	52.6	6	42.8	16	48.4
Direct Mail	1	5.2	4	28.5	5	15.1
Internal/ Employee Media	2	10.5	4	28.5	6	18.1
Personal Meetings	1	5.2	1	7.1	2	6

The table shows that three channels of information are mentioned in the analyzed documents most often:

1) Mass media (in general);

2) Telephone;

3) Internal/Employee media.

PR tools

TABLE IV

PR TOOLS MENTIONED IN CRISIS PLANS AND CASE STUDIES
(Number of Documents Analyzed: Crisis Plans - 19; Case Studies - 14; Overall - 33)

PR Tools	Crisis Plans		Case Studies		Overall	
	N_1	%	N_2	%	N_3	%
News/Press Release	9	47.3	5	35.7	14	42.4
B-roll/ Video Tape	3	15.8	3	21.4	6	18.8

PR	Crisis Plans		Case Studies		Overall	
Tools	N1	%	N2	%	N3	%
News/Press Conference	7	36.8	7	50.0	14	42.4
News/Press Briefing/Blitz	5	26.3	6	42.8	11	33.3
Media Statement/ Announcement	8	42.1	2	14.2	10	30.3
Up-dated Media Reports	1	5.2	1	7.1	2	6
Personal Media Interviews	10	52.6	6	42.8	16	48.5
PR Articles	1	5.2	1	7.1	2	6
Personal Appearance of High Company Officials on Broadcast Media	1	5.2	4	28.5	5	15.1
Newspaper PR Ads	1	5.2	2	14.2	3	9
Press/Media Kit	2	10.5	2	14.2	4	12.1
Photos/Photo Opportunities	4	21	2	14.2	6	18.1
Guided Site Tours	1	5.2	2	14.2	3	9
PR TV Program	0	0	1	7.1	1	3

PR	Crisis Plans		Case Studies		Overall	
Tools	N_1	%	N_2	%	N_3	%
PR Video Film	0	0	2	14.2	2	6
Backgrounders	1	5.2	2	14.2	3	9
Live Broadcasts (with interviews)	0	0	1	7.1	1	3
Phone Calls/ Phone Interviews	4	21	4	28.5	8	24.2
24 Hours Hot/Toll-Free Phone Lines	4	21	3	21.4	7	21.2
Recorded Phone News	1	5.2	0	0	1	3
Employee/ Management Briefing/ Meeting	1	5.2	3	21.4	4	12.1
Employee Publications	3	15.8	4	28.5	7	21.2
Public Speech or Statement	4	21	1	7.1	5	15.1
Personal Letter	1	5.2	4	28.5	5	15.1
Bulletin/ Brochure	1	5.2	3	21.4	4	12.1
Consumer/ Customer Kit	0	0	1	7.1	1	3
Personal Visits	1	5.2	3	21.4	4	12.1

PR	Crisis Plans		Case Studies		Overall	
Tools	N₁	%	N₂	%	N₃	%
Different Types of Special Events	0	0	4	28.5	4	12.1
Leaflet/Posters (for hand-outs or newspaper inserts)	2	10.5	0	0	2	6

The table shows that the following PR tools are mentioned most often:

1) Personal media interviews;

2) News/press release;

3) News/press conference;

4) Press briefing/blitz;

5) Media/press statement/announcement;

6) Phone calls/interviews;

7) 24-hour hot/toll-free phone lines;

8) Employee publications;

9) Photos and photo opportunities;

10) B-roll/video tape.

Sequence of steps

It is important to point out that 31.5 percent of crisis plans, 42.8 percent of case studies, and 36 percent of all analyzed documents do not stipulate or mention any sequence of steps of the crisis coping process. Nevertheless, after analysis of how often one or another step occupies one or another position in the analyzed documents, it is possible to suggest the following list of the steps in the following order:

1) Inform/notify company's management, employees, PR agent.

2) Review situation, collect information and, simultaneously, establish media center.

3) Notify families of people affected by the emergency.

4) Issue press release/statement.

5) Select or prepare the company's spokesperson.

6) Hold news/press conference.

7) Monitor media.

Time frames.

It is important to point out that 63 percent of crisis plans, 64 percent of case studies, and 63.5 percent of all analyzed documents do not stipulate or mention any time frame for any step of the crisis coping process. Only two documents (crisis plan of British Petroleum Co. and case study of crisis of Circle Line Co.) mentioned importance of the media deadlines for the crisis coping process.

Necessary back-up

TABLE V

TYPES OF NECESSARY BACK-UP MENTIONED IN CRISIS PLANS AND CASE STUDIES
(Number of Documents Analyzed: Crisis Plans - 19; Case Studies - 14; Overall - 33)

Necessary	Crisis Plans		Case Studies		Overall	
Back-Up Types	N_1	%	N_2	%	N_3	%
Equipment for media room	6	31.5	1	7.1	7	21.2

Necessary	Crisis Plans		Case Studies		Overall	
Back-Up Types	N1	%	N2	%	N3	%
List of crisis team members with phone numbers	2	10.5	0	0	2	6
Fact-sheet/ Backgrounder /Photos/Maps	6	31.5	1	7.1	7	21.2
Sample Texts of First Emergency News Release or Statement	7	36.8	1	·7.1	8	24.2
Crisis Plan	4	21.0	4	28.5	8	24.2
Media Training	7	36.8	2	14.2	9	27.2
Transportation Means	2	10.5	0	0	2	6
Media Contact/ Mailing Lists	2	10.5	0	0	2	6
Designated Location for Media/Press Center/Room	2	10.5	0	0	2	6
Emergency Fund	1	5.2	1	7.1	2	6
Appointed Spokesperson	2	10.5	0	0	2	6

The table shows that the following types of back-up are mentioned most often:

1) Media training;

2) Crisis plan;

3) Sample text of first emergency news/media release or statement;

4) Equipment for media center/room;

5) Company fact sheet/backgrounder.

ENDNOTES

[1] Crisis Management Plan, by Jiffy Lube's Chicago ADI Coop, 24 February 1989, Information center of PRSA, New York, NY, File: "Crisis Planning."

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[5] Sample Crisis Communication Plan, by the Corporate Communicators, a Division of Hameroff/Milenthal/Spence, Inc., 1993. Information center of PRSA, New York, NY, File: "Crisis Planning."

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[11] Allergan Crisis Communication Policy/Issues Identification Task Forces, by Allergan Inc., 1993, Information center of IABC, San Francisco, CA, File: "Crisis Communication."

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[16] Emergency Media Response Guidelines for Facility Managers, by Kerr-McGee Corporation, August 1995, Company's headquarters, Oklahoma City, OK, Company's archives.

[17] Media Relations and Response Guideline, by Oklahoma Natural Gas Company, 1995, Company's headquarters, Oklahoma City, OK, Company's archives.

[18] How to Manage Crisis, by Express Personnel Service, 1993, Company's headquarters, Oklahoma City, OK, Company's archives.

[19] Media Code, by Tulsa Hospital Council, 1995, Tulsa, OK, Tulsa Regional Hospital's files.

[20] Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau Case, by Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau, 1992, Information center of PRSA, New York, NY, File: "Crisis."

[21] United Way Public Relations Task Force, by Richmond/Southside United Way, 1992, Information center of PRSA, New York, NY, File: "Crisis."

[22] Circle Line Passenger Wounded by Gunfire, by Circle Line Co. and Patrice Tanaka & Company, Inc., 1995, Information center of PRSA, New York, NY, File: "Crisis."

[23] Las Vegas Hilton/AHCA Convention, by Las Vegas Hilton Hotel and Cohn & Wolfe/Atlanta, 1995, Information center of PRSA, New York, NY, File: "Crisis Guide."

[24] Denny's Restaurant Hostage Crisis and Restaurant Reopening, Flagstar Co., 1994, Information center of PRSA, New York, NY, File: "Crisis."

[25] Geritol Beats "Quiz Show," by Geritol Company and Ketchum Public Relations, 1995, Information center of PRSA, New York, NY, File: "Crisis."

[26] Meat Safety Reassurance Campaign, by National Live Stock and Meat Board, 1993, Information center of PRSA, New York, NY, File: "Crisis."

[27] Teens Shoot Teens: Crisis at Taco Bell, by Taco Bell and Todd Persons Communications, 1992, Information center of PRSA, New York, NY, File: "Crisis."

[28] Pepsi's Crisis Response: The Syringe Scare, by Pepsi Co., 1993, Information center of PRSA, New York, NY, File: "Crisis."

[29] <u>Alamo</u>, by Alamo Rent A Car Co., 1993, Information center of PRSA, New York, NY, File: "Crisis."

[30] <u>FPL: Out of Andrew's Shadow</u>, by Florida Power and Light Co., 1992, Information center of PRSA, New York, NY, File: "Crisis."

[31] <u>A Positive Light</u>, by United Service Automobile Association, 1993, Information center of IABC, San Francisco, CA, File: "Crisis Communication."

[32] <u>C&P's Crisis Communication Plan</u>, by C&P Telephone Co., 1992, Information center of IABC, San Francisco, CA, File: "Crisis Communication."

[33] <u>1995 Oklahoma City Storm</u>, by Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co., 1995, Oklahoma City, OK, Company's files.

CHAPTER IV

STAGE TWO OF PHASE ONE:
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter is not a regular literature review such as may be found in other scholarly works. In this particular study it has a dual nature because of the complex methodological approach to the research.

First of all, the literature review is stage two of phase one of the research. This means that the main aim of this part of the study is to point out the elements of the crisis communication process that were highlighted by mass media scholars and practitioners as common elements of the crisis coping process and, consequently, might be considered as the basic elements of crisis response. Such an analysis will help to make the scope of the study wider and check the findings of the previous stage of research.

Secondly, the literature review will play the traditional role in this study. It will overview what was written about crisis communication and highlight the gap in knowledge that will be filled with this research.

The review will flow from general to specific. Books, dissertations, and papers will present thorough and detailed analysis of the topic while articles - just separate aspects and elements.

Every unit in the review will be analyzed in terms of what it fails to contribute and what it contributes to the final product of the study. generic crisis communication guidelines.

Review of the Literature

Books.

There are few books devoted to crisis communication. Mostly, one can find some general public relations books or textbooks where a chapter or a portion of a chapter is devoted to this topic.

One of the books entirely devoted to crisis topics is Crisis Management by Steven Fink. It was published by the American Management Association and generally covers management and marketing problems during crisis times. Nevertheless, the author could not avoid the communication aspect and a substantial part of the book is devoted to this issue.

At the very beginning of the chapter "Crisis Management Plan" Fink wrote: "Every business, large or small, public or private, should have a crisis management plan. Every division of every company, industrial or service business, should also have a crisis management plan. There are no exceptions, merely difference of degree."[1]

However, according to the same author a special crisis survey revealed that "50 percent of the respondents admitted that they do not have a prepared crisis management plan. Of those companies that reported having had a crisis in the past, 42 percent still do not have any sort of crisis management plan in the event another crisis hits."[2]

The author proposes general guidelines or steps for the very beginning of the crisis coping process, using the example of the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis. At the beginning of the crisis, the company:

- Appointed a senior executive to put all matters aside and 'take charge' and find out what was going on. ...
- Directed the crisis manager to get on the scene. (Gather facts.)
- Directed a public relations professional to accompany the crisis manager. (Crisis communications.)
- Required that he (the chairman) be kept informed. (Also crisis communications.)[3]

These guidelines are very important but very general. It is still unclear what, when, and how the appointed crisis manager functioned. Like the majority of authors writing on crisis response, Fink drew conclusions from case studies. Namely, he explored four major crises: the Ohio Savings & Loan crisis, the Union Carbide crisis, the Procter & Gamble Rely Tampon crisis, and the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis. He did a very thorough analysis of all the crises. The book is very interesting to read. Nevertheless, the author did not point out the common or basic elements of the crisis communication process. Probably it was not his goal, he merely described and commented on how the particular crises were handled.

However, it is possible to pick out some important elements for the purpose of this study. For example, he identified the most important publics for Johnson & Johnson during the Tylenol crisis. He wrote that the company paid special attention:

1. To the consumers.
2. To the employees.
3. To the communities they serve.
4. To the stockholders.[4]

It is also interesting to note that more than half of the chapter "Crisis Management Plan" is devoted to different ways of using telephones during crisis time. The author mentioned such PR tools as media phone calls/interviews, 800 hot lines, trained and well-instructed switchboard operators.[5]

Besides that, Steven Fink considered the use of different types of mass media to reach different kinds of publics.[6]

Another book entirely devoted to the crisis communication process is called Crisis in Organizations: Managing and Communicating in the Heat of Chaos by Laurence Barton. Although this book is mostly concerned with management issues, great attention is paid to the communication aspects of the crisis coping process.

For example, the author proposes 17 action steps during a time of crisis. Some of them have already been pointed out in this study, for example, contact the CEO, contact victims' families, establish a crisis communication center, evaluate the damage.[7] At the same time, there are several details that have not been included in this study.

The author suggested:

-appoint two people responsible for media contacts so that they could take rotating shifts of twelve hours each.;

-immediately contact local or regional law enforcement and emergency preparedness agencies;

-contact a representative of the labor union(s) if employees are unionized;

-cancel company's advertising until the crisis is over.[8]

Also, the author suggested 14-point media relations guidelines. Some elements of the guidelines are addressed here because they were not mentioned previously in this research:

-two-way flow of information should be maintained;

-do not speculate, say what is known exactly;

-do not go "off the record";

-do not discuss liability.[9]

In a sample crisis management plan the author gave the main points of the first crisis message, "The media should be provided with the following information: Facts - ... who, what, when, where, why, and how: What happened? When? And where? How and Why did it happened? ... Who was involved? ... Extent and nature of injuries, property damage (no dollar amounts), continuing damage, and insurance coverage."[10]

The Barton book is one of the most complete and detailed. It provides a very good basis for developing a crisis plan if a practitioner has enough time to do it. But, as mentioned above, many companies still do not have crisis communication plans. In case of emergency, a PR person cannot use this book because it is quite long (more than

200 pages) and the guidelines and sample plans, that may be found in this book, are general areas to consider rather than strict directions for "how-to-do-it."

For the purpose of this study, it is possible to point out the following crisis response elements from the Laurence Barton book:

The most important publics: mass media, employee, consumers, investors, government agencies, special publics.

The most effective channels of information: mass media, telephone.

The most effective PR tools: press release, press conference, personal media interviews, media phone calls.

Necessary back-up: appointed spokespersons (two of them), equipment, written materials about the company, training is very important.

Also, it is appropriate to note that at the basis of his analysis is a set of case studies again including Tylenol, Rely Tampons, and Union Carbide. Other crises examined are Exxon, Coca Cola, Chrysler, AT&T, and Perrier. This demonstrates a common problem of many books. The authors analyze the same crises of the same companies. This narrows the scope of their studies to a dozen major cases. Second, the experience of such large and wealthy companies can not be considered typical.

E.W.Brody in his book Managing Communication Processes: from Planning to Crisis Response proposed a 12-step communication strategy for crisis response:

1. Define the problem.
2. Establish objectives.
3. Catalog resources.
4. Gather information.
5. List assumptions.
6. Assess program potential.
7. Formulate policy.
8. Define audiences.
9. Establish strategies and tactics.
10. Organize and assign tasks.
11. Establish schedules and monitoring systems.
12. Assess results.[11]

These guidelines are very general. And it seems too late to formulate policy, catalog resources, and define audiences when a crisis has already struck an organization. Also, it is interesting to note that the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis is again included in this book.

One of the most recent PR textbooks - The Practice of Public Relations by Fraser Seitel, - has just four pages devoted to crisis communication. The most interesting part of the chapter is called "The Lessons of Valdez" and explains the main public relations lessons of the famous oil tanker catastrophe:

1. Develop a clear, straightforward position.
2. Involve top management.
3. Activate third-party support.
4. Establish an on-site presence.
5. Centralize communications.
6. Cooperate with the media.
7. Don't ignore employees.
8. Keep the crisis in perspective.
9. Begin positioning the organization for the time when the crisis is over.
10. Continuously monitor and evaluate the process.[12]

These guidelines are vague and, again, based on the Exxon Valdez case.

Probably, the clearest, most complete, and condensed crisis communication guidelines are presented in the book Public Relation Cases by Jerry Hendrix:

I.   Public relations emergency headquarters (PR HQ). The PR director stays in PR department or designated PR HQ and supervises:
A.   Notification and liaison
      1.   Internal: Notify the CEO and other top officials on immediate "need-to-know" basis
      2.   External: Notify the media; law enforcement officials; government agencies; next of kin of injured or dead, before public release of names (24-hour rule suggested)
B.   Preparation of materials for media
      1.   Have company backgrounder, fact sheet, and bios of officers already prepared

2. Prepare basic news release on crisis as soon as possible (one-hour rule suggested)

   a. Include all known facts - what happened, how, when, where, who and how many involved - not why (fault)

   b. Be certain all information is accurate; never release unconfirmed information.

   c. Withhold names of victims until next of kin are notified (or 24 hours, whichever comes first)

   d. Clear release with senior management, legal department, personnel department

   e. Issue release immediately to local and national mass media, specialized publications, employees by bulletin boards and phone, community leaders, insurance company, pertinent governmental agencies.

3. Issue timely statements to media in ongoing crises

4. Use *one-voice principle* - information only from official organizational statements

5. Use *full-disclosure principle* (except admission of fault)

C. Public information center (PIC)

II. Media information center (MIC)

   A. Designate a place for media people to gather, if necessary

   B. Locate MIC at site near crisis area, but away from PR HQ. (Media people admitted to disaster site must be *escorted* by PR personnel)

   C. Have sole spokesperson on duty day or night at MIC [13]*

From the chapter "Emergency Public Relations", for the purpose of this study, it is possible to point out the following elements of the crisis communication process highlighted by the author of the book.[14]

The most important publics.	1) Mass media.
	2) Employees.
The most effective channels of information.	1) Mass media (in general).
	2) Telephone.

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* Emphasis in original text.

The most effective PR tools.	1) Press release.
	2) Personal media interviews.
	3) Photographs.
	4) Phone media calls (company's switchboard personnel should be well-instructed where to transfer media calls).
	5) Employee bulletins.

Dissertations.

There are several Ph.D. dissertations devoted to crisis communication. For example, one written by Sally J. Ray in 1991 considers how the National Transportation Safety Board conducted post-crisis investigations on the airline industry.[15] Sally Ray's work is not within the scope of this particular study because the dissertation explores the recovery stage of a crisis while this thesis is concentrated on the acute stage.

Two Ph.D. Dissertations were written in 1992 that deal with some theoretical aspects of crisis communication.

One of them is called "Crisis Public Relations: A Theoretical Model." This work considers how the organizational culture affects the success or failure of the crisis coping efforts of an organization. The dissertation studies such variables as risk communication, crisis communication policy, pre-crisis relationships, crisis communication practices, organizational communication ideology, and the autonomy of public relations practitioners.[16] This work is of little help for this particular thesis because it explores how the **general pre-crisis** conditions affect the communication process during a crisis.

The dissertation of Joanne Hurd is called "Crisis Response Tools: A Layered Model of Communication Support." The author's main concern in this study is the

internal organizational communication process during a crisis and how it affects the crisis decision-making process. Modern electronic PR tools (such as e-mail, computer databases, and electronic modeling systems specially) are considered by the author. At the same time, the author does not exclude from the analysis such features as regular phone systems, paper files, and even human memory. The variables are grouped into five categories:

1. **hardware** (such as computer, a telephone, a satellite, or paper);
2. **software**;
3. **data** stored in organizational memory (the storage device may be shared individual memories, paper, or a computer storage device);
4. **people** involved with any of the other system components (those gathering data, or making the decisions supported by the crisis response tools);
5. **procedures** describing the interaction between system components.[17*]

The author argued that there are seven layers that one by one affect the final crisis decisions made by management. They are:

1) connectivity (conditions of organizational communication systems);

2) organizational data correction system;

3) organizational data filtering system;

4) media choice;

5) organizational memory (human as well as computer data base systems);

6) organizational values;

7) group decision-making process.[18]

This work is quite interesting because it confirms the conclusions of Marra's work that organizational culture affects the crisis communication process.

For the purpose of this study, the following elements may be pointed out:

Methods of the work.   1) Electronic.

                              2) Interpersonal.

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* Emphasis in original text.

Channels of Information. 1) On-line services.

2) Telephone.

3) Personal meetings.

PR tools. 1) E-mail.

2) Management meetings.

Necessary back-up. Computer hardware and software.

Papers.

Several papers on crisis communication are contained in the files of the information center of the International Association of Business Communicators.

The first one was prepared for a staff development workshop by the Edmonton Public School system.[19] The following elements can be pointed out for the purpose of this study:

Sequence of steps. 1) Contact emergency team members.

2) Protect human welfare and property.

3) Notify families of individuals involved in the crisis.

4) Keep senior administration informed.

5) Work with staff and community.

6) Inform the media as soon as possible.

Necessary back-up. 1) Written crisis plan.

2) List of emergency team members and spokespersons.

3) Media and other important contact lists (telephones).

4) A site for a media room.

5) Company background materials.

6) Training is very important.

The paper presented at the IABC conference in London in 1987 contains general crisis communication guidelines. The author wrote that during crisis time it is necessary to remember the following points:

> Don't Panic. ...
> Define the Problem. ...
> Broaden the Issue. ...
> Assign Duties. ...
> Centralize the Information Flow. ...
> Develop a Statement/Response. ...
> Obtain Approvals. ...
> Select Spokespeople. ...
> Communicate Facts. ...
> Other Audiences. ...
> Media Monitoring.[20]*

Downs Matthews in his paper presented at an IABC conference proposed ten steps leading toward effective communication with a hostile public:

> First of these pointers is to Keep Cool and Face Reality. ...
> Next, analyze your audience. ...
> Third, analyze the medium. ...
> Fourth, determine the apparent reason for hostility. ...
> Fifth, determine the real reason for hostility. ...
> Sixth, determine your communication objectives. ...
> Seventh, identify solutions that appear to have a chance of succeeding. ...
> Eighth, recognize and sympathize with your audience's concerns. ...
> Ninth, strive for balance in your message. ...
> Tenth, stand up for your rights.[21]*

The last IABC archive paper is a transcript of a presentation made by Roger Mounford, Managing Director of Hambro Pacific Ltd., and Anne Forrest, Managing Director of Hill and Knowlton Asia Ltd. They named eight rules of crisis communication:

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* Emphasis in original text.
* Emphasis in original text.

Rule No.1: Don't think for a moment that an impending crisis can be kept a secret! ...

Rule No.2: When you first learn of a crisis, get your facts straight immediately or make it clear that the facts are being objectively established. ...

Rule No.3: Have enough staff on hand to grasp, research and master the individual situations as they arise. ...

Rule No.4: Appoint one spokesperson (plus an alternate) who is convincing and who enjoys a high degree of credibility with the media. ...

Rule No.5: Do your homework, monitor public reaction not just locally but wherever you do business, and be prepared. ...

Rule No.6: This is when you really need outside advisers. Senior managers tend to follow the advice of outside advisers at times like these. ...

Rule No.7: Expect panic reaction and keep calm. ...

Last rule: Remember, keep your sights on the long term; don't allow your focus to get side-tracked onto minor issues.[22]

Also, Mountford and Forrest described how they handled a real world crisis:

1).   We were all gathering as much information as we could. ...

2).   We immediately arranged for our offices in 8 cities around the world to monitor all media. ...

3).   ... notified all Tung Group managers around the world that no one was to talk to the media except the official spokesmen in Hong Kong. ...

4).   We appointed spokesmen ...

5).   Nearly every piece of communication that went to creditors, customers, employees, regulatory authorities was reviewed to be sure that it contained nothing that could be misconstrued, or was contradictory to other announcements, or would make headlines. ...

6).   We gave media training to senior executives of the Tung Group, and to the spokesmen as well. ...

7).   We worked hard to avoid "disclosures" - bad news coming from other sources or dug up by the media that would put the Tung Group on the defensive.[23*]

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* Emphasis in original text.

Research and Professional Articles.

PRSA ARCHIVES

The archives of the Public Relations Society of America contains the most recent material on crises: all the articles were written either in 1994 or in 1995 by prominent PR specialists for major PR publications. None of the articles contain detailed crisis communication guidelines. Mostly they provide general tips and interesting details.

For example, the article written by Keith M. Hearit for Public Relations Review explores how CEOs can use apologies during the crisis times. The author concluded that usually "they label their wrongdoing in a way that displays sorrow but limits culpability, and use dissociations to distance themselves from the wrongdoing."[24]

David Umansky in Public Relations Quarterly in 1994 gave eight principles of crisis communication:

> Centralize the communication flow, both inward and outward. ... Develop a crisis team and empower it. ... Define the real problem and your objectives, using research if appropriate. ... Contain the problem, even if it means a short term sacrifice. ... Resist the combative instinct and remember concern, concern, concern. ... Assume that the worst case will happen and hold back your complete trust of the people who seem to know the most. ... Answer what happened, why and what you are going to do about it through articulate spokespeople. ... Use direct communications with your most important audiences.[25]

John Birch in the same journal believed that although there are some new factors in crisis communication, the main rules have not changed. These rules are:

Pre-Crisis

- Develop a crisis plan
- Train, with simulated crisis situations
- Create relationships with potential allies and adversaries
- Build/enhance corporate reputation

Crisis
- Identify problem. Set up target group feedback
- Control the process and message
- Work the plan
- Respond: quickly, honestly, people-to-people
- Communicate continually: confirmed facts only

Post-Crisis
- Continue:
  -maintaining relationships
  -proactive communications
  -reputation building[26]

The same year, two small articles on crisis communication were published in pr reporter. The first one provided little more than general crisis advice such as "Keep your cool ... Get all the legal help ... Get ready for the media blitz ... Do whatever you can...to encourage residents to funnel their frustration into positive action ... Make sure police and public safety personnel are trained ... Keep your door open."[27] The second one, among other routine details, noted that using more than one spokesperson may be a good idea.[28]

In 1995, several articles devoted to crisis communication were published in Public Relations Quarterly, PRSA's Tactics, and tips & tactics.

Alfonso Gonzalez-Herrero and Cornelius B. Pratt wrote that the company's response during crisis time should involve:

- Evaluating the company's response to the crisis.
- Pre-empting negative publicity and communicating to the organization's constituencies the actions being taken to solve the problem.
- Targeting the company's message to the appropriate audiences, obtaining third-party support from an expert, and implementing an internal communications program.[29]

In the same issue of Public Relations Quarterly, Mary-Angie Salva-Ramirez explained why the crisis communication efforts of McDonald's after the San Ysidro

Massacre were successful. She believed that it was so because McDonald's did the following:

- Was quick to react
- Acted in a responsible manner
- Accepted solution/suggestion from outside sources
- Took control of the information process
- Built public support
- Was humane[30]

An article published in PRSA's Tactics pointed out that video news releases (VNR) were very effective crisis communication tools. Crises handled by Pepsi and Hasbro/Kenner companies demonstrated the value of VNRs.[31]

An article published in a supplement to pr reporter called tips & tactics provides companies' chief officials with this advice on what to do in case of emergency:

- Get to the scene.
- Respond to media questions immediately.
- A responsible official has to demonstrate that the company cares.[32]

In the summer of 1995, David Guth published a research article in Public Relations Review. This article is an outcome of serious study that he conducted among PRSA and IABC members. The study uncovers "an alarming absence of crisis planning and training in organizations."[33] This demonstrates the lack of a serious attitude by government officials and businessmen to crisis PR in general. This attitude can also be noticed in the positions the PR people occupy in an organization's structure. It is rare when a PR person is among the real decision-makers. And David Guth believed that such a practice seriously affects crisis situations: "...many of the crises that confront agencies can be avoided or, at least, minimized. However, this can not happen if the person responsible for organizational public relations is not a key player in the decision-making process."[34]

IABC ARCHIVES

Files of the information center of the International Association of Business Communicators contain mostly articles published in <u>Communication World</u> magazine. Most of the articles are either case studies or crisis communication tips provided by public relations practitioners.

Anne Marie Taylor asked in her article "CEOs in the Slammer" several questions concerning an organization's rediness for a crisis. They may be summarized as:

Does your organization have a crisis management plan and keep it current?

Has it been pretested?

Does your organization have a designated media trained spokesperson and a back-up one?

Does your management understand the objectives in case of an emergency?

Does your management really believe that the media serve the public interest?

Does your management know what types of crisis may hit your organization?[35]

Jim Wexler in his article, "Using Broadcast Television to Control a Crisis," emphasized the importance of video materials for crisis communication. He wrote that since 90 percent of Americans depend on television as their primary source of news, organizations during crisis times should increase the use of such tools as B-roll or video footage.[36]

An article written by Martin Arnold contradicted the point of view accepted by the majority of PR specialists. He argued that sometimes the best thing a CEO can do during a crisis is to reject media interview requests rather than accept them. The author proposed a list of 13 questions that should help determine if it is appropriate to accept media interview requests or not. A CEO or his PR adviser should take into account such factors as level of risk, audiences, other available ways of disseminating the same information, spokesperson's characteristics, extent of legal liability, etc.[37]

In the article "Coping With Crisis: What the Textbooks Don't Tell You," Rita Cipalla gave some tips to follow in case of an emergency. They may be summarized as:

Communicate effectively during a crisis. After the crisis, it is difficult to make people listen.

Do not ignore rumors. Usually, they are much worse than reality.

The entire organization, not just the communication staff, must be ready for a crisis.

Spend more time with good reporters. Do not waste your time with the bad ones.

Remember that all of an organization's constituencies are equal.

Do not neglect the lawyers. A good lawyer can be your best ally.[38]

General principles of employee communication during a crisis are provided by Lynn Fisher and William Briggs in the article "Communicating with Employees During a Time of Tragedy." They may be summarized as:

Management must provide candid, honest and timely information.

Personnel should be trained to handle an emergency.

Use established internal media which have already demonstrated success.

Use employee opinion leaders to disseminate information.

Evaluate messages for clarity and consistency.

Use outside counselors.[39]

Other Available Research Articles Providing Crisis Communication Guidelines.

In the winter of 1987/1988, Barbara Lau published in Management Quarterly an article in which she proposed several basic principles of crisis communication. She wrote that effective crisis communication involves: "1. Making company representatives accessible to the media. ... 2. Backing statements of concern with corresponding actions.

... 3. Choosing spokesperson who can oversee and understand the nature of the problem.

... 4. Acting quickly and responsibly toward affected publics."[40]

Bruce Harrison in the Public Relations Journal in 1991 noted several problems that may come into play when a disaster or emergency plan is at work. For example, politicians may move rapidly to shield the victims, emphasize the positive points when the public simply is not prepared for the negative ones, and a disaster location may be so remote that effective communication is very difficult.[41]

Ann Higbee in Occupational Hazards in 1992 indicated seven steps which corporations should take to shorten the crisis life cycle. All of these steps are communication tasks. They may be summarized as:

1. Develop a crisis communication plan.

2. Recognize that rumor control is critical.

3. Treat the crisis seriously.

4. State only what are known as facts.

5. Communicate early and often.

6. Know your audiences.

7. When the crisis is over, get back to business as soon as possible.[42]

Bob Druckenmiller in Business Marketing in 1993 highlighted three aspects of crisis communication: "1. The facts should be given as soon as they are available. ... 2. Communication must be personal. ... 3. Communication channels should be carefully chosen."[43]

Ann Carney and Amy Jorden in the Public Relations Journal in 1993 indicated seven elements that should be included in any communication strategy:

1. Analysis or audit to find aspects of the business susceptible to negative publicity.
2. Situation analysis.

3. Audience identification.
4. Key message development.
5. Anticipation of and preparation for potential questions.
6. Selection of the medium for the message.
7. Designation of a spokesperson.[44]

Georgine Cannon in CMA Magazine in 1995 proposed several points that every crisis preparedness plan should include:

1. List of the emergency team with the phone numbers.

2. Key messages.

3. Operating guidelines.[45]

Also, the author proposed a set of crisis communication guidelines that may be summarized as follows:

1. Bring the crisis team together.

2: Gather information.

3. Develop key messages.

4. Centralize the information flow.

5. Designate a spokesperson.

6. Find allies.

7. Keep local, state, and national governments informed.

8. Keep all lines of communication open.[46]

Crisis Communication Process Features and Details.

In an article published in the Public Relations Journal in 1987, William Baldwin described a successful public relations campaign conducted by nongovernmental organizations and the department of public information of the United Nations during the crisis which hit this the UN in the late 1980s.

The PR methods the UN used included: a letter writing campaign to ABC affiliates and program sponsors, public release of folders with different UN-related

symbols and inscriptions, filming of peace-keeping forces in action, and public tours of UN buildings.[47] The article indicated that the use of such PR tools and methods as direct mail, PR film, and guided tours is widespread and may be used for many kinds of crises.

Beth Elyn Rosenthal in Communication World in 1988 pointed out four elements of a crisis communication plan that often are overlooked. She wrote that the people preparing a crisis response plan should not omit: 1. procedures for alerting the media, 2. guidelines for news conferences, 3. development of company information packets for the media, and 4. internal communication procedures for company executives.[48]

Lawrence Werner in the Public Relations Journal in 1990 proposed adding several points to all crisis communication plans. These points are the audience groups to be targeted, message elements, communication technologies, people's responsibilities, time and schedule commitments.[49]

Raymond Kotcher in Public Relations Quarterly in 1992 proposed a list of new technologies to be considered for crisis contingency plans: satellite communications, video news releases, facsimile technology, voice mail, video and print distribution services, desktop publishing systems, and specialized computer databases.[50]

At the end of this review it would be appropriate to cite Michael Kempner who wrote in "How to Handle the Media During a Crisis," published in Risk Management in 1995, "A well conceived media crisis plan will prove invaluable to any company that finds itself the object of negative news coverage. ... It is poor handling, not the crisis itself, that causes the potential downfall of the company. Anticipating potential problems and determining how to present them to the media will not just save valuable time, but will help the company portray itself in the best light possible."[51]

Evaluation

First of all, after the analysis of several dozen sources, it became clear that there are no strict, instructional, and well-detailed crisis communication guidelines. The only guidelines that can be a basis for serious crisis communication planing are those of Hendrix presented in <u>Public Relation Cases</u>.

Second, crisis communication literature is very unsystematic. Although there were several works exploring some theoretical aspects of crisis communication, there is still no theory in this area. Mostly, the authors writing in this area either give very general principles of the crisis coping process or just highlight some elements of this process, basing their recommendations on case studies. Another deficiency of these works is that for the most part they analyze the same set of crises that involve large, wealthy companies such as Exxon, Union Carbide, Pepsi, and others. Such an approach narrows the scope of the body of knowledge in this area and focuses on PR practices that are out of the main stream trends.

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CHAPTER V

PHASE TWO:

INTERVIEWS WITH THE PR PRACTITIONERS

Findings and Analysis

This chapter will present the findings of the second phase of the research. For this part of the study, 10 interviews with experienced PR practitioners were undertaken and analyzed. All the interviews took place in three cities in Oklahoma: Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Bartlesville. The names of the people interviewed were taken from the directory of members of the local chapters of PRSA. All the interviewees were asked to point out and explain the use of the crisis coping process elements that are considered in this study. The following is the analysis of the 10 interviews one by one.

Mr. Jere Smith, director of public relations of Phillips Petroleum Company, took part in an interview on October 12, 1995, in company headquarters in Bartlesville.[1] Phillips Petroleum Company has its own oil exploring and refinery facilities all over the world. Mr. Smith personally handled several crises and, consequently, has experience in this area. He pointed out the following elements.

The most important publics.

1) Mass media.

2) Employees.

3) Government.

4) Communities.

5) Stockholders.

Main methods of work.

1) Interpersonal.

2) Print.

3) PR advertising.

The most used and effective channels of information.

1) Personal meetings.

2) Mass media (in general).

3) Telephone.

The main and most effective PR tools.

1) Meeting with senior managers.

2) Media briefing.

3) Press conference.

4) Live interviews.

5) News release.

6) Company president's press conference.

7) Company officials' on-site interviews.

8) Company officials' live interviews for morning shows.

9) Full-page PR advertisements.

10) 24 hours toll-free telephone line for people and media representatives.

The sequence of steps or actions to take during a crisis.

1) Brief meeting with company's senior managers.

2) Media briefing with press release.

3) Company president's press conference.

4) President *must* visit people in the hospital.

5) Evening live interviews for evening broadcast programs and morning

newspapers.

6) On-site interviews.

7) Morning live interviews for morning shows.

8) Full-page advertisement praising employees.

9) Memorial service.

10) Work with affected community: psychological help, financial help.

Time frames for the stages of the crisis coping process.

1) Evening live interviews for evening broadcast programs and morning newspapers should be held no later than at 9:00 p.m.

2) Press releases should be issued 3-4 times a day.

3) After 24 hours, scale down the crisis tension by replacing the company's president with a lower level official.

4) The day after the accident, arrange 15-minute on-site interviews. (Usually, after that, 2/3 of journalists leave.)

5) A week after the accident, hold a memorial service.

Necessary back-up that must be always available in case of emergency.

1) Special telephone drop-lines.

2) Portable toilets for on-site media center.

3) Each factory must have its own trained spokesperson.

4) Emergency fund (to pay damages).

5) Maps of facilities.

6) Cellular phones.

7) Computers.

9) Worker and management profiles for all company facilities.

10) Air photos of all company facilities.

Mr. Joe Williams, president of Joe Williams Communications Company, Inc., gave an interview on October 26, 1995, in his office in Bartlesville.[2] He owns a small PR company which is very active in many areas of public relations. Mr. Williams personally handled several crises and, consequently, has experience in this area. He pointed out the following elements.

The most important publics.

1) Mass media.

2) Employees.

Main methods of work.

Interpersonal.

The most used and effective channels of information.

1) Mass media (in general).

2) Personal meetings.

The main and most effective PR tools.

He believes that PR people can use whatever tools they consider appropriate in a particular situation.

The sequence of steps or actions to take during a crisis.

The first thing that must be done is company's executive meeting for the purpose to create a crisis plan. Only after that, real crisis actions may start.

Time frames for the stages of the crisis coping process.

Everything must be done as soon as possible.

Necessary back-up that must be always available in case of emergency.

No special back-up is necessary.

Mr. Ed Wheeler, general manager of corporate communications of Oklahoma Natural Gas Company, gave an interview on December 19, 1995, in his office in Tulsa.[3] Oklahoma Natural Gas Company is a provider of natural gas for a major part of the state of Oklahoma. Mr. Wheeler personally handled several crises and, consequently, has experience in this area. He pointed out the following elements.

The most important publics.

1) Customers.

2) Mass media.

3) Employees

Main methods of work.

1) Interpersonal.

2) Electronic.

3) Print.

The most used and effective channels of information.

1) Television.

2) Radio.

3) Newspapers.

4) E-mail.

5) Company's radio dispatcher (through the company's portable radio receivers).

6) Telephone.

7) FAX.

The main and most effective PR tools.

1) Media statement.

2) Personal interview.

3) Postings on company's electronic bill-board.

4) Phone calls.

5) Bulletin sent to the company's employees by FAX.

The sequence of steps or actions to take during a crisis.

It is important to be on location at the emergency as soon as possible and give to the media representatives all necessary information.

Time frames for the stages of the crisis coping process.

The first media statement must be no more than 15 seconds long so that journalists might include it in their programs without any changes.

Necessary back-up that must be always available in case of emergency.

1) It is necessary to have sample of the first emergency statement and to hand it to every field crew member. It is not necessary to have a single spokesperson. With such a kind of sample statement every worker is a company's spokesperson.

2) Media training for company's workers and officials is extremely important.

Mrs. Gail Monnot, communications director of Metropolitan Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, gave an interview on December 19, 1995, in her office in Tulsa.[4] The main types of crises Mrs. Monnot deals with are state legislative issues or media problems of a Chamber's member. She pointed out the following elements.

The most important publics.

1) Mass media.

2) Chamber members.

Main methods of work.

1) Print.

2) Electronic.

3) Interpersonal.

The most used and effective channels of information.

1) Daily newspapers.

2) Radio.

3) Television.

4) Own publications.

5) On-line services

6) Telephone.

The main and most effective PR tools.

1) FAX to media (feature stories as well as regular press releases).

2) Personal interviews.

3) Monthly magazine.

4) Weekly letters to members.

5) Internet postings.

6) Phone calls.

The sequence of steps or actions to take during a crisis.

1) Clear the message with an appropriate senior manager.

2) Clear the message with the board of directors.

3) Only after that, contact media.

Time frames for the stages of the crisis coping process.

Mrs. Monnot believes that there is no special time frames for any crisis

coping process steps.

Necessary back-up that must be always available in case of emergency.

1) Chamber's background information.

2) Chamber's phone directory.

3) Area population data.

4) Local media directory.

5) Copies of all pervious press releases and other documents sent to media.

Mr. Paul Renfrow, supervisor of external communications of Oklahoma Gas and Electric Company, gave an interview on December 20, 1995, in the company's headquarters in Oklahoma City.[5] Oklahoma Gas and Electric Company is a provider of electrical power for a major part of the state of Oklahoma. Mr. Renfrow personally handled several crises and, consequently, has experience in this area. He pointed out the following elements.

The most important publics.

1) Customers.

2) Mass media (especially as a means to reach customers).

Main methods of work.

1) Print.

2) Interpersonal.

The most used and effective channels of information. When people lose electrical power, television is not working, and the following mass media outlets are especially important:

1) Newspapers.

2) Battery-power radio receivers.

The main and most effective PR tools.

1) Press releases.

2) Media calls.

3) Media statements/announcements.

The sequence of steps or actions to take during a crisis.

1) Gather the information.

2) Appoint a spokesperson.

3) Obtain management's approval of the texts of releases and statements.

4) Establish command center (in the company's headquarters) and information center (somewhere closer to the field events).

Time frames for the stages of the crisis coping process.

Everything must be done as soon as possible.

Necessary back-up that must be always available in case of emergency.

No special back-up and no special training are necessary.

Mr. Don Sherry, manager of communications of Oklahoma Natural Gas Company, gave an interview on December 20, 1995, in the company's headquarters in Oklahoma City.[6] Although he represents the same company as Ed Wheeler, he has different experience and a different approach to the crisis communication process. He pointed out the following elements.

The most important publics.

1) Mass media.

2) Employees.

Main methods of work.

1) Interpersonal.

2) Print.

3) Audiovisual.

The most used and effective channels of information.

1) Mass media (in general).

2) Telephone.

3) Personal meetings.

The main and most effective PR tools.

1) News releases.

2) Personal interviews.

3) Toll-free phone lines.

4) Recorded phone news.

5) Management-employee group meetings.

6) Press conferences (although they are not as effective as personal media interviews).

The sequence of steps or actions to take during a crisis.

Mr. Sherry believes that there is no special sequence of steps of the crisis coping process that would provide the best result.

Time frames for the stages of the crisis coping process.

Everything must be done immediately.

Necessary back-up that must be always available in case of emergency.

The company has a special emergency van equipped with all the necessary things.

Mrs. Linda Haneborg, vice president of marketing and public relations of Express Personnel Service Company, gave the interview on December 21, 1995, in the company's headquarters in Oklahoma City.[7] The company supplies temporary workers for many different types of businesses in the United States and has its franchisees all over the world. Mrs. Haneborg personally handled several crises and, consequently, has experience in this area. She pointed out the following elements.

The most important publics.

Mass media.

Main methods of work.

Interpersonal.

The most used and effective channels of information.

1) Mass media (in general).

2) Telephone.

The main and most effective PR tools.

1) Media statement.

2) Personal interviews.

3) Phone calls.

The sequence of steps or actions to take during a crisis.

1) Gather information.

2) Prepare statement.

3) Wait for the press to come to or call the company's office.

4) Deal with media requests.

5) Thank the media representatives who worked with you best.

Time frames for the stages of the crisis coping process.

No special time frames exist.

Necessary back-up that must be always available in case of emergency.

1) Press kit.

2) Sample of the first emergency statement.

3) Media training is very important.

Mr. Tom Campbell, manager of public relations of Tulsa Regional Medical Center, gave an interview on December 28, 1995 in his office in Tulsa.[8] Mr. Campbell personally handled several crises and, consequently, has experience in this area. He pointed out the following elements.

The most important publics.

1) Mass media.

2) Employees.

3) Patients' families.

Main methods of work.

1) Interpersonal.

2) Audiovisual.

The most used and effective channels of information.

1) Newspapers.

2) Radio.

3) Telephone.

4) Television.

<u>The main and most effective PR tools.</u>

1) Executives' personal interviews.

2) Media statements.

3) Recorded phone news for media, people, and employees.

4) Phone calls.

<u>The sequence of steps or actions to take during a crisis.</u>

A particular situation dictates the best sequence.

<u>Time frames for the stages of the crisis coping process.</u>

Everything is done as media inquiries come.

<u>Necessary back-up that must be always available in case of emergency.</u>

No special back-up is necessary.

Mr. Dow Dozier, director of corporate communications of Kerr-McGee Corporation, gave an interview on December 29, 1995, in the company headquarters in Oklahoma City.[9] Kerr-McGee Corporation is an energy and chemical company engaged in oil and natural gas, coal, and industrial and specialty chemicals. Mr. Dozier personally handled several crises and, consequently, has experience in this area. He pointed out the following elements.

<u>The most important publics.</u>

1) Mass media.

2) Special publics depending on type of a crisis (for example, security analysts).

<u>Main methods of work.</u>

1) Interpersonal.

2) Print.

The most used and effective channels of information.

1) Television.

2) Newspapers.

3) Radio.

4) Telephone.

The main and most effective PR tools.

1) News release.

2) News conference.

3) Phone calls.

4) Personal interviews.

The sequence of steps or actions to take during a crisis.

1) Establish command post.

2) Issue news release.

3) Hold press conference.

4) Follow media inquiries.

Time frames for the stages of the crisis coping process.

1) The first press release should be issued within one hour (1 double-spaced page).

2) News/press conference should be held within 2-3 hours after the first press release.

3) The day after the accident, first press release should be issued by 8 a.m.

Necessary back-up that must be always available in case of emergency.

No special back-up is necessary.

After an initial telephone conversation, Patricia Allen, Crisis Communication Research Co., answered the questions of this study in writing.[10] She pointed out the following elements.

The most important publics.

1) Mass media.

2) Stockholders.

Main methods of work.

Interpersonal.

The most used and effective channels of information.

Mass media (in general).

The main and most effective PR tools.

News conferences.

The sequence of steps or actions to take during a crisis.

It is difficult to determine.

Time frames for the stages of the crisis coping process.

Media contacts should be possible 24 hours a day.

Necessary back-up that must be always available in case of emergency.

1) Speaker training.

2) News conference technical logistics (mostly, communication equipment).

Conclusion

The following tables summarize the results of the interviews with the PR practitioners.

The following symbols are used:

N stands for number of PR practitioners who mentioned a particular item.

% stands for percentage of PR practitioners who mentioned a particular item.

The most important publics.

TABLE VI

TYPES OF PUBLICS MENTIONED BY THE PR PRACTITIONERS AS VERY
IMPORTANT
(Number of Interviews Analyzed - 10)

Publics Mentioned	N	%
Mass Media	10	100
Employee/Members	6	60
Government	1	10
Community	1	10
Investors/Donors/Shareholders	2	20
Customers/Consumers/Guests	2	20
Special Publics	1	10
General Publics	0	0
Special Media	0	0
Civic/Group/Political Leaders	0	0
Legislators/Regulators	0	0
Affected People	1	10
Partners	0	0

The table shows that two types of publics were identified as very important most
often:

1) Mass media;

2) Employees/Members.

The main methods of work.

TABLE VII

THE MAIN METHODS OF WORK MENTIONED BY THE PR PRACTITIONERS
(Number of Interviews Analyzed - 10)

Methods of the Work	N	%
Print	6	60
Audiovisual	2	20
Interpersonal	10	100
PR-Advertising	1	10
Special Events	0	0
Electronic	2	20

The table shows that two methods of the PR work were mentioned most often:

1) Interpersonal;

2) Print.

The most used and effective channels of information.

TABLE VIII

THE MOST USED AND EFFECTIVE CHANNELS OF INFORMATION MENTIONED BY THE PR PRACTITIONERS
(Number of Interviews Analyzed - 10)

Channels of Information	N	%
Mass Media (in general)	5	50
Television (especially)	4	40

Channels of Information	N	%
Radio (especially)	5	50
Print Media (especially)	5	50
On-Line Services	2	20
Hand-Out	0	0
Telephone	7	70
Direct Mail	0	0
Internal/Employee Media	1	10
Personal Meetings	3	30

The table shows that two channels of information were mentioned most often:

1) Mass media (in general);

2) Telephone.

It is interesting to note that in this phase of the study 50 percent of the respondents were able to determine what type of mass media (TV, radio or print media) was the most important to them. Nevertheless, all three types of mass media received almost equal ratings. Appearance of on-line services in the list is also very important.

The main and most effective PR tools.

TABLE IX

THE MAIN AND MOST EFFECTIVE PR TOOLS MENTIONED BY THE PR
PRACTITIONERS
(Number of Interviews Analyzed - 10)

PR Tools	N	%
News/Press Release	5	50

PR Tools	N	%
B-roll/Video Tape	0	0
News/Press Conference	4	40
News/Press Briefing/Blitz	1	10
Media Statement/Announcement	4	40
Up-dated Media Reports	0	0
Personal Media Interviews	7	70
PR Articles	1	10
Personal Appearance of High Company Officials on Broadcast Media	1	10
Newspaper PR Ads	1	10
Press/Media Kit	0	0
Photos/Photo Opportunities	0	0
Guided Site Tours	0	0
PR TV Program	0	0
PR Video Film	0	0
Backgrounders	0	0
Live Broadcasts (with interviews)	1	10
Phone Calls/Phone Interviews	6	60
24 Hours Hot/Toll-Free Phone Lines	2	20
Recorded Phone News	2	20
Employee/Management Briefing/Meeting	2	20
Employee Publications	1	10
Public Speech or Statement	0	0
Personal Letter	1	10
Bulletin/Brochure	1	10

PR Tools	N	%
Consumer/Customer Kit	0	0
Personal Visits	0	0
Different Types of Special Events	0	0
Leaflet/Posters (for hand-outs or newspaper inserts)	0	0
Internet Postings	2	20

The table shows that the following PR tools were mentioned most often:

1) Personal media interviews;

2) Phone calls/interviews;

3) News/press release;

4) News/press conference;

5) Media/press statement/announcement.

The sequence of steps or actions to take during a crisis.

It is important to point out that 40 percent of the persons interviewed did not stipulate or mention any sequence of steps for the crisis coping process. Nevertheless, after analysis of how often one or another step occupies one or another position in the interviews, it is possible to suggest the following list of the steps in the following order:

1) Review situation, collect information and, simultaneously, establish media center.

2) Meet top company officials (as high as possible) to clear messages, confirm plans.

3) Issue press release/statement.

4) Hold news/press conference.

<u>Time frames for the stages of the crisis coping process.</u>

It is important to point out that 70 percent of the persons interviewed did not stipulate or mention any time frame for any step of the crisis coping process. The only common point is that the first crisis-related press release should be brief: no more than 1 double-spaced page in length.

<u>Necessary back-up that must be always available in case of emergency.</u>

TABLE X

TYPES OF NECESSARY BACK-UP MENTIONED BY THE PR PRACTITIONERS
(Number of Interviews Analyzed - 10)

Necessary Back-Up Types	N	%
Equipment for media room	3	30
List of crisis team members with phone numbers	1	10
Fact-sheet/Backgrounder/Photos/Maps	3	30
Sample Texts of First Emergency News Release or Statement	2	20
Crisis Plan	0	0
Media Training	0	0
Transportation Means	4	40
Media Contact/ Mailing Lists	0	0
Premises	1	10
Emergency Fund	1	10
Appointed Spokesperson	1	10
Audience/Population Research Data	1	10

The table shows that the following types of back-up were mentioned most often:

1) Media training;

2) Equipment for media center/room;

3) Company fact sheet/backgrounder/photos/maps;

4) Sample text of first emergency news/media release or statement.

ENDNOTES

[1] Jere Smith, Director of Public Relations of Phillips Petroleum Company, interview by author, October 12, 1995, Bartlesville, OK, interview transcript, Phillips Petroleum Company's headquarters, Bartlesville.

[2] Joe Williams, President of Joe Williams Communications Company, interview by author, October 26, 1995, Bartlesville, OK, interview transcript, Joe Williams Communications Company' headquarters, Bartlesville.

[3] Ed Wheeler, General Manager of Corporate Communications of Oklahoma Natural Gas Company, interview by author, December 19, 1995, Tulsa, OK, tape recording, Oklahoma Natural Gas Company's office, Tulsa.

[4] Gail Monnot, Communications Director of Metropolitan Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, interview by author, December 19, 1995, Tulsa, OK, tape recording, Tulsa Chamber of Commerce's office, Tulsa.

[5] Paul Renfrow, Supervisor of External Communications of Oklahoma Gas and Electric Company, interview by author, December 20, 1995, Oklahoma City, tape recording, Oklahoma Gas and Electric Company's headquarters, Oklahoma City.

[6] Don Sherry, Manager of Communications of Oklahoma Natural Gas Company, interview by author, December 20, 1995, Oklahoma City, tape recording, Oklahoma Natural Gas Company's headquarters, Oklahoma City.

[7] Linda Haneborg, Vice President of Marketing and Public Relations of Express Personnel Service Company, interview by author, December 21, 1995, Oklahoma City, interview transcript, Express Personnel Service Company's headquarters, Oklahoma City.

[8] Tom Campbell, Manager of Public Relations of Tulsa Regional Medical Center, interview by author, December 28, 1995, Tulsa, OK, tape recording, Tulsa Regional Medical Center, Tulsa.

[9] Dow Dozier, Director of Corporate Communications of Kerr-McGee Corporation, interview by author, December 29, 1995, Oklahoma City, tape recording, Kerr-McGee Corporation's headquarters, Oklahoma City.

[10] Patricia Allen, Tulsa, OK, to author, Stillwater, OK, December 1995, Transcript in the author's archive, Stillwater.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: CRISIS COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

General

This chapter will summarize this study and the findings of the various phases of the research, and suggest what meanings may be attached to those findings. At the end of the chapter, the final outcome of the study -- generic crisis communication guidelines -- will be presented as recommendations.

Summary

Methodology.

Generally, this study is qualitative research analyzing information from secondary as well as primary sources. There were two main phases in the research.

The first one was the Archival Integrative Research Review that examined real world crisis communication plans, case studies, and articles written by mass media scholars and practitioners The main sources of information for the study were archives and files of the information centers of the Public Relations Society of America and the International Association of Business Communicators

The main task of the first phase was to look at how often PR tools, methods of work, or steps of the PR process had been mentioned or stipulated as mandatory ones in real world crisis communication plans. The findings of the content analysis of the plans were supported by the study of the cases which had been entries for or winners of major PR awards. The main objective of the examination of the case studies was to find out

what tools and methods had worked best under what circumstances. The literature review helped to increase the scope of the study and to support or reject the previous findings with conclusions based on the published opinions of other researchers and practitioners.

For triangulation, ten in-depth interviews with public relations practitioners working in Oklahoma were undertaken. The analysis of the material obtained was the second phase of the research. The findings were based on the broad practical experience of real-world PR practitioners as well as on the scholarly literature.

For the first stage (content analysis and case studies) of the first phase of the research the physical framework for the sample consisted of files from the archives of the information centers of the Public Relations Society of America and the International Association of Business Communicators. Files, as they existed in the summer of 1995, under the heading "Crisis Communication" were taken for analysis.

The material consisted of:

-19 real world crisis communication plans of major American companies;

-14 case studies (most of them are winners of or entrants for the major PR awards);

-four conference papers and presentations on crisis topics;

-16 articles analyzing the general crisis communication process as well as particular cases.

Material for the literature review (stage two of the first phase of the research) consisted of papers and articles from the associations' archives, books and articles from the library of Oklahoma State University, and several dissertations available through interlibrary loan service.

The sample for the second phase of the study (in-depth interviews) consisted of public relations practitioners working in Oklahoma. The factor of accessibility and territorial proximity played a role in the process of selection of the sample of people for interviews.

Findings.

The research questions of the study were:

What are the common elements of crisis plans?

What are the basic elements of crisis response?

The elements examined were:

-The most important publics (media, employee, members, community, government, investors, consumers, special publics);

-Methods of work (print, audiovisual, interpersonal, electronic, PR advertising, special events);

-The most used and effective channels of information (mass media in general, television, radio, print media, on-line services, telephone, direct mail, hand-outs, personal meetings, internal/employee media);

-The main and most effective PR tools (news releases, photographs, news conferences, media kits, radio/TV announcements, interviews, personal appearances of management on broadcast media, news tapes for radio, recorded telephone news, brochures, bulletins, videotapes, telephone calls, guided site tours, formal speeches, billboards and signs, internet postings, etc.)

-The best sequence of steps or actions to take during a crisis;

-Time frames for all the stages of the crisis coping process;

-Necessary back-up that must be available in case of emergency (research information about main audiences; equipment, premises, information about an organization and its management).

The first research question was resolved through three-step process. The first step was content analysis of real world crisis communication plans. Only common elements were pointed out. The next step was analysis of case studies. Since all the companies acted according to their crisis plans, common points of their actions inevitably reflect the common points of their crisis plans. Again, only common

elements were highlighted. The last step was analysis of professional and research literature in the area of crisis communication. The elements that had been recommended by mass media scholars and practitioners for crisis plans were pointed out.

Since it is logical to consider the common elements of crisis plans as the basic elements of crisis response, the second research question was resolved through combination of the elements pointed out after the first phase of the study and the elements highlighted by the second one.

Finally, the basic elements of crisis response were found to be:

The most important publics.

1) Mass media.

2) Employee/Members.

Other important publics may include: customers/consumers/guests; affected

people; general public; special publics; government;

investors/donors/shareholders.

The main methods of work.

1) Interpersonal.

2) Print.

3) Audiovisual.

The most used and effective channels of information.

1) Mass media (in general).

2) Telephone.

3) Employee media.

The main and most effective PR tools.

1) Personal media interviews;

2) News/press release;

3) News/press conference;

4) Phone calls/interviews;

5) Media/press statement/announcement;

6) Press briefing/blitz;

7) 24 hours hot/toll-free phone lines;

8) Employee publications;

9) Company backgrounder: press kit with historical and statistical information, photos and executive bios;

10) B-roll/video tape/PR film.

The sequence of steps or actions to take during a crisis.

1) Contact/inform/notify company's management, employees, PR agent.

2) Collect information, review situation and, simultaneously establish media center/room.

3) Notify families of people affected by the emergency.

4) Make media/press statement/announcement and press release. (Usually, it is done at press/ media briefing/blitz.)

5) Hold press/news conference.

6) Instruct company's switchboard, establish additional phone lines including hot/toll-free line.

7) Monitor media during whole crisis.

Time frames for all the stages of the crisis coping process.

This is the only part of the study where definite answers were not received. Only one crisis plan, one book, and four interviews gave separate details in relation to the stages of crisis coping process. There are two common points that were highlighted by these sources:

-It is important to take into account mass media deadlines;

-Everything must be done as soon as possible during a crisis.

<u>Necessary back-up that must be available in case of emergency.</u>

1) Crisis communication plan.

2) Plan must be tested, staff must be trained.

3) Location for public relations headquarters or media center/room must be designated.

4) Equipment for public relations headquarters or media center/room must be available.

5) Sample texts of first emergency statement and press release.

6) Company backgrounder (press kit with historical and statistical information, photos, and executive bios) plus, if affordable, PR video film.

7) Two designated and trained spokespersons.

8) List of emergency team members (with addresses, work and home phone numbers).

9) Media contact list (with FAX and phone numbers).

10) Emergency fund (to pay damages, long distance call bills, salaries to temporary personnel, and other expenses).

11) Company's telephone switchboard with some spare lines.

12) Possibility to quickly expand company's telephone capabilities: additional phone sockets; field drop-lines, preliminary agreement with a telephone company about emergency toll-free lines.

Conclusions

The findings of the study seem to be logical and mutually supportive.

Common sense supports the idea that during a crisis every move must be simple. A PR person simply has no time for anything complicated. That is why the set of basic crisis response elements should be brief and simple.

For example, use of the interpersonal method of communication implies that inter-communicating parties can perceive each other's immediate feedback (through questions, comments, emotions, gestures, etc.). This method includes such PR tools as personal interviews, news/press conferences, press/media blitz/briefings, phone calls/interviews, media/press statements/announcements, communication with media representatives, employees, and other publics through hot/toll-free telephone lines. All of these tools are on the list of the main and most effective tools.

Print communication also includes elements from the list of the most effective PR tools: press release and different forms of employee publications.

PR video film, B-roll, and recorded phone news are types of audiovisual methods of communication.

It is important to note here the dual nature of mass media in the public relations process. For a PR person mass media are simultaneously audience to communicate with and a channel of information to communicate through.

There are two main types of publics/audiences pointed out in this study: mass media and employee/members. Both of them are very important.

Without good media relations even the smallest crisis can become a disaster. This fact is known to any public relations practitioner. Majority of people often judge an organization during a crisis depending on the image delivered by media. At the same time, the mass media is a powerful channel of information through which a PR person can reach any audience/public he/she wants: customers and consumers; general and

special publics; government and regulatory agencies; investors and shareholders; community members and affected people.

Certainly, without the understanding and help of its own employees an organization will never survive a crisis. Employees are the second most important public/audience. They may be reached through the mass media as well as through employee media, which is the second most important channel of information identified in this study. It would be logical to suggest that it is the second most important channel because it is directed to the second most important audience.

Telephone is the universal channel of information. It may be used to communicate with media (media phone interviews or press releases sent by FAX), with employees (so called "tree system" when a manager calls to several employees and after that each of them calls several others and so on), and with any public (through hot/toll-free phone lines or recorded phone news).

The interdependence among PR tools, methods, audiences/publics, and information channels can be clearly demonstrated in a graphic way. First, it is necessary to give two brief definitions.

There are two types of audiences/publics for PR practitioners. These two types exist specifically in the area of public relations because of the dual nature of the mass media. The audiences may be defined as immediate or final.

The immediate audience/public is the one that a PR practitioner is communicating with right at the moment of communication.

The final audience/public is the one at whom a PR practitioner targets his/her message.

For example, at a press conference, the immediate audience is the representatives of the mass media while the final audience may be community members.

TABLE XI

INTERRELATIONS BETWEEN CERTAIN ELEMENTS OF THE CRISIS
RESPONSE PROCESS

The Main and Most Effective PR Tools	Methods of Communication with Immediate Audience/ /Publics	Immediate Audiences/ /Publics	Channels of Information to the Final Audiences/ /Publics
1) Personal media interviews	Interpersonal	Mass media	Mass media
2) News/press release	Print	Mass media	Mass media
3) News/press conference	Interpersonal	Mass media	Mass media
4) Phone calls/interviews	Interpersonal	Mass media, Employees, and/or any necessary publics	Telephone
5) Media/press statement/ /announcement	Interpersonal	Mass media	Mass media
6) Press briefing/blitz	Interpersonal	Mass media	Mass media
7) 24-hour hot/toll-free phone lines	Interpersonal	Any necessary public	Telephone
8) Employee publications	Print	Employees	Employee media

The Main and Most Effective PR Tools	Methods of Communication with Immediate Audience/ Publics	Immediate Audiences/ Publics	Channels of Information to the Final Audiences/ Publics
9) Company backgrounder	Print	Mass media	Mass media
10) B-roll/ /video tape/ /PR film	Audiovisual	Mass media	Mass media

The frequency of appearance of the elements in this table is the same as the lists in the "Findings" section of this chapter.

This table clearly demonstrates how closely all the basic elements of crisis response are tied together. Also, this table shows how strongly appearance of one element on the list of basic elements of crisis response substantiates appearance of the others.

The same may be noted in relation to the sequence of steps and necessary back-up elements. In the steps noted, one can find all the tools, methods, publics, and channels. Also, all the elements of the back-up list are used in the PR steps.

All the above demonstrates that the identified elements are well-substantiated and may be considered as basic elements of crisis response. Consequently, they can become the basis for generic crisis communication guidelines.

Theoretical Point of View.

The theoretical comprehension of crisis public relations is at its very initial stage. Nevertheless, a theory that may be effectively applied to crisis situations was proposed by J. E. Grunig and L. A. Grunig. Actually, this theory concerns the PR

process in general. However, it can aid understanding what underlies crisis PR and why it should be practiced in a particular way.

The Grunigs proposed four models of public relations, that is "four typical ways of conceptualizing and practicing communication management."[1] They wrote:

> The *press agentry* model applies when a communication program strives for favorable publicity, especially in the mass media. A program based on the *public information* model uses 'journalists in residence' to disseminate relatively objective information through the mass media and controlled media such as newsletters, brochures, and direct mail.[2*]

The above models are one-way models. Basically this means that the information goes from an organization to its publics, and not the reverse. The PR programs following these models are not based on research or strategic planning. These models are also called "asymmetrical"[3] ones: "They try to make the organization look good either through propaganda (press agentry) or by disseminating only favorable information (public information)."[4]

Further, the Grunigs identified two other models:

> The third model, the *two-way asymmetrical* model, is a more sophisticated approach in that it uses research to develop messages that are most likely to persuade strategic publics to behave as the organization wants. ... *Two-way symmetrical* describes a model of public relations that is based on research and that uses communication to manage conflict and improve understanding with strategic publics.[5]

The Grunigs assert that most of the modern sophisticated PR people "do not practice a pure symmetrical model."[6] Mostly, they practice a so called "*mixed-motive* model"[7] which is a combination of the two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical models. Nevertheless, since the mixed-motive model is the mixture of the two others it is not considered as a separate one.

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[*] Emphasis in original text.

It is very important to understand the concept of the four models because the PR practice of a particular organization depends directly on which theoretical model underlies it. Depending on a prevailing model, an organization's management selects its PR strategies, tactics, and problem coping techniques.

The findings of this study seem to indicate that companies tend to practice either two-way asymmetrical or mixed-motive models during crisis times.

For example, the interpersonal method of communication implies that inter-communicating parties can perceive each other's immediate feedback through questions, comments, emotions, gestures, etc. Besides that, media monitoring was found to be one of the basic elements of crisis response; it was mentioned often in crisis plans and case studies. The results of monitoring may be the reasons for correcting crisis response actions. All this shows that feedback plays a very important role in the crisis coping process.

At the same time, common sense indicates that it would not be reasonable to expect a company to practice the two-way symmetrical model during crisis time, that is, to devote equal amount of efforts to talking and listening. Especially during acute stage of a crisis, it is very important for a company to make its case clear for every important audience. Outgoing communication is the main type of activity at this time. Certainly, feedback is perceived and may cause some corrections in actions but, again, an explanation of what is going on is the main concern of the company's management and PR people.

Nevertheless, it is important to realize that without feedback a company will remain blind and deaf and will never be able to act properly in a crisis.

That is why two-way asymmetrical and mixed-motive models seem to be the most appropriate for the crisis communication process.

Recommendations

<u>Recommendations for Public Relations Practitioners</u>.

The following generic crisis communication guidelines are recommendations to public relations practitioners on how to handle crisis situations.

Before displaying the guidelines, it is necessary to make some explanations and reservations.

First of all, this study is qualitative research and the guidelines are based not only on the statistical data from the tables shown in the "Conclusion" sections of the previous chapters but also on general American public relations practice and common sense.

Second, the guidelines try to give as much detail as possible. But every company is different. If some steps are not necessary or redundant for a company, a PR person can skip them. For example, crisis in a small company may not require holding a press conference and establishing a media center. Often, all work in such a company is done by the only PR person. This allows one to omit several guidelines.

Third, the guidelines provide the **basic** elements of crisis response that is the simplest ones. Usually, a PR person has no time to invent or perform anything complicated during the acute crisis stage. Nevertheless, it does not mean that imagination must be cut off. PR people may add whatever points they need to the guidelines in order to make the crisis response more effective.

Fourth, the guidelines provide instructions only for the first 48 hours of crisis. If the acute stage of a crisis lasts longer, a PR person can simply repeat the cycles of the first or second day as it might seem appropriate.

Fifth, some of the guidelines are disputable. Such points should be considered in the context of a particular crisis in order to decide whether it is appropriate to undertake a certain action or not.

Finally, all the limitations indicated in the "Assumptions and Limitations" section of the "Methodology" chapter apply to the guidelines.

Crisis Communication Guidelines.

I. Necessary back-up that always must be available in case of an emergency:

1) Crisis communication plan.

2) Plan must be tested, staff must be trained.

3) Location for public relations headquarters or media center/room must be designated.

4) Equipment for public relations headquarters or media center/room must be available: desks, chairs, filing cabinets, copy machines, waste baskets, three to nine telephones each capable of long distance communication, typewriters or computers with printers, FAX machine, television set, VCR, battery operated radio, office supplies.

5) Sample texts of the first emergency statement and press release.

6) Company backgrounder (press kit with historical and statistical information, photos, and executive bios) plus, if affordable, PR video film.

7) At least two designated and trained spokespersons (so that they would be able to take turning 12-hour shifts).

8) List of emergency team members (with addresses, work and home phone numbers). Every member must know exactly his/her responsibilities. The members must be trained to properly exercise them.

9) Media contact list (with FAX and phone numbers).

10) Emergency fund (to pay damages, long distance call bills, salaries to temporary personnel, and other expenses).

11) Powerful company telephone switchboard with some spare lines.

12) Possibility to quickly expand company's telephone capabilities: additional phone sockets, field drop-lines, preliminary agreement with a telephone company about emergency toll-free lines.

II. Communication steps:

1) Contact top company's officials as soon as possible to either notify them or receive information and instructions. Tell them that you will contact them again as soon as the text of the first statement/press release is ready.

2) Collect information by calling:

    a) manager of the unit where the emergency is taking place,

    b) manager who is responsible for the territory where emergency is

    taking place.

3) Call the members of the emergency team and give instructions to convene all team members in the designated place immediately and to start establishing public relations headquarters at or near the company's headquarters or media center/room at a crisis site, depending on nature and location of the crisis. Also, instruct him/her to notify affected communities, law enforcement, government, and necessary regulatory agencies. If you are the only PR person in the company you must do it yourself.

4) Take the sample press statement/releases and draft one for this situation.

5) Call the company official with whom you have been talking and clear press statement/release with him/her.

    (Steps 1 through 5 should not take more than one hour.)

6) Contact the company's switchboard and instruct the staff to refer all pertinent calls to public relations headquarters or the press/media center.

7) Contact your telephone company and establish a toll-free line to help control rumors.

(If the media do not contact you, contact them yourself first. Do not think that the crisis will not be revealed)

8) Schedule media/press briefing/blitz where an official statement and identical press release will be delivered prior to the nearest media deadlines.

9) Schedule a press conference by the next media deadlines.

TABLE XII

RECOMMENDED SCHEDULING FOR PRESS BRIEFINGS AND PRESS CONFERENCES TAKING INTO ACCOUNT REGULAR MEDIA DEADLINES

Crisis Emerges	Press Briefing With Press Release May Be Scheduled	Press Conference May Be Scheduled
Midnight - 6 a.m.	8 a.m. - 10 a.m.	At 2 p.m.
6 a.m. - Noon	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.	2 p.m. - 8 p.m.
Noon - 8 p.m.	2 p.m. - 8 p.m.	By 8 p.m. or At 8 a.m. (next day)
8 p.m. - Midnight	By 8 a.m.	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Schedule may vary according to the deadlines of media. But try to schedule briefings or press conferences as close to the deadlines as you can so that journalists don't have time to add their own or expert comments to your press release so your information may go to public unaltered.

10) Notify or instruct one of the emergency team members to notify families of people affected by the crisis.

11) Notify or instruct one of the emergency team members to notify employees through a "phone tree" system and/or employee publications and instruct the employees to refer all media interview requests to the public relations headquarters, media/press center/room or to the designated spokespeople (one voice principle).

12) Hold press/media briefing/blitz to issue the company's official statement and deliver identical press releases. Also, provide journalists with the company backgrounder kit.

Statement/release should be in the range of 15 - 90 seconds or no more than one double-spaced standard printed page so that journalists might include it in their stories without or with few changes. Text of statement/release should include:

a) All known facts (do not try to hide anything: full-disclosure principle) -- what happened, when, where, who and how many people are involved, what is being done, what and when first recovery results are expected.

b) Make sure all information is absolutely accurate. Do not release unconfirmed information.

c) Withhold names of victims until next of kin are notified (or 24 hours, whichever comes first).

13) Between first briefing and next press conference, try to obtain as much new information as you can.

14) Prepare a new press release that should be delivered at the following press conference.

15) At the same period of time, arrange as many personal or phone media interviews with the designated company's spokespeople (one voice principle) as

you can. Try not to spend time with unimportant, utterly aggressive, or simply bad journalists. Try to talk to well-known, loyal journalists or to representatives of the most important media.

16) It is strongly recommended that you have the company's CEO for the subsequent press conference. It will demonstrate the company's high level of concern about the crisis. (Some companies which did not do it were accused of indifference to what had happened.)

17) Instruct CEO concerning the upcoming press conference.

18) Hold a press conference with the CEO. Schedule it according to the above table. At the conference, release new press release with new information and, if available, video materials (B-roll/video tape/PR film). New press releases should include information on what has been done to that time, what is being done, what and when the next recovery results are expected.

19) If there are injured people, organize the CEO's visit to the hospital, covered by media.

20) Arrange several personal CEO interviews with the most important media representatives.

21) By the following night, make a recording of the most recent press release and put this recording on the toll-free phone line so that people might call and hear it. However, you may assign members of the emergency team to personally answer phone calls all night, if it is necessary. In this case, they should be instructed on what to say and what not to.

22) Next morning's news/press release should be issued by 8 a.m.

23) Next morning's press briefing should be conducted without the CEO. This helps scale down crisis tension and media interest.

24) In the afternoon, arrange for TV journalists and photographers to visit the site of the emergency, if it is safe. Make sure that there is nothing offensive on

site, like human body parts. Journalists must be escorted. Let them approach the site as close as it is possible and safe. The tour should be short, about 15 minutes. Some practitioners argue that after such "stand-ups" two thirds of journalists may leave.

25) Schedule the next press conference with the new press release by the next media deadlines.

26) Issue follow-up press/media statements/releases as often as you receive new information.

27) Continue on-going personal or phone media interviews with the designated company's spokespeople (one voice principle).

28) Every night, leave a new recording for the toll-free line or people on duty.

29) Monitor media content.

30) If there were people killed, in a week hold a memorial service.

Recommendations for Further Research.

Since such a hot topic as crisis communication simply can not be closed, recommendations for further research may be endless.

First of all, this study is a qualitative one with a limited scope. It would be interesting to broaden the scope of the study and enhance its precision through quantitative research. This study might be a good beginning for such research. For example, a survey questionnaire could be designed based on the results of this study.

It would be useful also to undertake more in-depth interviews with a larger and more diverse sample of PR practitioners. This would give more and more diverse material for analysis to support or correct the findings of this study.

Also, it would be interesting to undertake a similar study in the area of political public relations.

Besides that, a comparative international crisis communication research would be very useful and interesting because it could take into account cultural differences.

Concluding Comment

Using a varied methodological approach, this study identified basic crisis response elements that allowed the researcher opportunity to create generic crisis communication guidelines. The guidelines presented in this study can provide inexperienced American PR people, PR people in the countries which are just starting their "free market" journey (such as Russia), and, finally, all PR people who are working on crisis communication plans with some basic tips and instructions. Even if a company does not have a crisis communication plan, by following these guidelines public relations people of the company should be able to do right things at the right time.

ENDNOTES

[1] James E. Grunig, "Communication, Public Relations, and Effective Organizations: An Overview of the Book," in Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management, ed. James E. Grunig (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1992), 18.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 19.

[7] Ibid.

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APPENDIX

List of Questions Sent to Public Relations Practitioners Before Interviews

Dear Sir or Madam!

1. Have you ever dealt with crisis communications in your practice?

2. If yes, could you give me some examples?

3. What area of activity is usually main for you during the crises: media relations, government relations, employee relations, customer relations, investor relations or other?

4. What are the main methods of your work during the crisis?

5. What are the main PR tools you use then?

6. What are the main steps during crisis situations?

7. What is the sequence of steps providing the best effect?

8. When and how the main channels of information may be used most effectively?

9. What is the most effective schedule for crisis communication actions?

10. What must be always available in every company in case of an emergency: research data, equipment, etc.?

If you have a crisis communication plan, could you provide me with a copy of it?

Thank you very much for your help!

Sincerely,   Alexandre G. Nikolaev

VITA

Alexandre G. Nikolaev

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: A STUDY OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION DESIGNED TO
DEVELOP GENERIC CRISIS COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

Major Field: Mass Communications

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in St.-Petersburg, Russia, On March 2, 1968.

Education: Graduated from High School # 536, St.-Petersburg, Russia in June 1985;
received Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism from St.-Petersburg State
University, St.-Petersburg, Russia in June 1993. Completed the requirements for
the Master of Science degree with a major in Mass Communications at
Oklahoma State University in May 1996.

Experience: Started as a free lance reporter in St.-Petersburg, Russia in January 1984;
employed as a journalist in different editorial staffs of newspapers, radio and
television stations in Russia for eight years; started working in public relations in
1990 at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.;
worked as a private PR counselor and a Member of Board of Directors of
Russian Public Communications Company for two years, St.-Petersburg, Russia.

Professional Membership: Full Member and a Member of Governing Council of the
Professional Communicators Guild of Russia, Full Member of the St.-Petersburg
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