



**AN ASSESSMENT OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION AT SELECTED CAR
MANUFACTURING COMPANIES IN GAUTENG, SOUTH AFRICA**

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DECLARATION

I, Talent Sinenhlanhla Khuzwayo, declare that the work presented in this dissertation is my work. All sources used have been accordingly acknowledged and referenced.

TS Khuzwayo

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. Thank you for making it possible to attain my Master's with as much ease as possible.

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I would like to humbly thank the following people who have made my attainment of this Master's degree possible:

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ABSTRACT

South Africa has several car manufacturing companies or plants, referred to as open systems. Due to their nature as open systems, crises are inevitable. Crises have the potential of inducing grave consequences for the organisation's reputation and, ultimately, its survival. Being prone to conflicting situations necessitates that each organisation have an effective crisis management plan that details the crisis management and crisis communication steps in great detail. However, implementation of crisis communication and crisis management always comes with challenges for the crisis management teams.

Increasingly, in the car manufacturing industry, car recalls are being made as certain models tend to have potentially fatal defects. This increase in car recalls is the reason behind the development of this qualitative study. Therefore, the researcher undertook a case study approach, utilising semi-structured interviews to obtain the required data. The value of qualitative research lies in its ability to provide answers to the questions 'why' and 'how.' Thus, broadening the understanding of crisis management as a phenomenon and the experiences and feelings of the crisis management teams at car manufacturing companies. The research participants were four car manufacturing companies (Companies A, B, C and D) with their head offices in Gauteng, South Africa. The crisis management teams were selected as the target population because they actively attempt to remedy the crises and interact with various organisational stakeholders when a crisis situation occurs.

The findings identified gaps in crisis communication planning and implementation, given the ever-changing business and public relations environments in which organisations operate. As a result, the researcher made recommendations that will assist public relations and communications practitioners today and in the future to handle various crises effectively in the motor industry. Ultimately, car manufacturing companies will benefit by improving the protection of their organisations and their stakeholders from reputational and livelihood threats and further reducing those threats' negative impacts.

Key words: public relations, crisis, crisis communication, crisis management, issues management, risk management, car manufacturing companies, recalls.

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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Kinsey (2019: 1) refer to a crisis as an event that occurs suddenly, demanding a prompt reaction and interferes with an organisation's performance due to its nature of bringing or having the potential to bring an organisation into disrepute. Thus, a crisis impairs the organisation's future profitability, growth and possibly its survival. Blokhina (2020: 11) then ascertains that crisis management is the art of making decisions to mitigate the effects of such an event, usually while the event itself is unfolding. It implies that management reaches resolutions about the organisation's future under stress and simultaneously lacks critical information. In simple terms, crisis management is how an organisation handles a crisis.

Globally and locally, public relations and communications practitioners face the challenge of effectively implementing crisis communication techniques during crisis management in their respective organisations (Ashari, Ahmed and Samani, 2017: 1; Olawale, 2014: 79). For example, it has become common worldwide, particularly in South Africa, for car manufacturing companies to recall millions of their models due to potentially fatal defaults Buthelezi (2017: 1). As a result, this study focused on assessing the crisis communication at four selected car manufacturing companies (Company A, B, C, and D) at their headquarters in Gauteng, South Africa, during motor vehicle recalls. The research focused on companies that have all recalled specific models made between 2007 and 2017 as they were likely to burst into flames due to various faulty engineering issues. The likelihood alone of cars catching fire is a significant hazard as many people's lives are automatically put at risk of harm, and the organisations' reputations and credibility may be in question (Olawale, 2014: 79).

Lando (2014: 5) explains that many organisations have a general Crisis Management Plan (CMP) designed to handle the actual crisis. However, when it comes to communicating with stakeholders about the situation, as it occurs, many organisations are ill-prepared as they lack a Crisis Communication Plan (CCP). Ashari, Ahmed, Samani (2017: 1), and Olawale (2014: 79) agreeably affirm that crises are inevitable in all organisations, regardless of the organisation's nature, and have the potential of inducing grave consequences for the organisation's reputation and ultimately its survival. De Wolf and Mejri (2013: 49) further cite William, Treadway (1992) and Gray (2013) as saying that amid a crisis, people try to find order, and this is where crisis communication plays a central

role. They add that crisis communication thus refers to techniques used to manage the outcome, impact and public perception of a crisis.

Lukasz (2016: 1) further adds a series of adverse outcomes when an organisation fails to respond and communicate in ways that meet the community's standards and expectations. He advises that the most strategic services that public relations practitioners can offer organisations are assisting management in understanding how inappropriate or poorly thought-out crises responses gravely impact the organisation.

The University of Oxford (2016: 1) thus stresses that crisis communication is essential in effective crisis management. Its role is to ensure continued operational effectiveness in the organisation during and after a significant incident, guide and reassure those affected, and safeguard its reputation. According to the University of Oxford (2016: 1), the three critical stages of crisis communication are preparing in advance of an issue or crisis, having set communications activities during the incident, and doing a follow-up after the incident has occurred. The researcher further elaborated on the three stages in the literature review.

Having noted that crisis communication is a remedy for a crisis, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) was then discussed as a theoretical framework that public relations practitioners could utilise to maximise protecting the organisation's reputation following the crisis occurrence. Tripp (2016: 16) cites Coombs (2007: 1), who refers to the SCCT as an evidence-based framework, providing guidelines that crisis managers can employ to protect the organisational reputation post-crisis. It comprises three core elements: the crisis, crisis response strategies used to repair the corporate reputation, reduce adverse effects and prevent harmful behavioural intentions, and a system for matching the crisis and crisis response strategies. The crisis response strategies may be to deal with, diminish, deny, or accommodate the crisis.

In addition, the Chaos Theory denotes that organisations should view chaos positively. Alshammri, Pavlovic, and AL Qaied (2016: 1) suggest that chaos can be a beneficial and healthy element of any development process. Simultaneously, the Systems Theory implies that there needs to be teamwork for any system (organisation) to succeed. It further states that every organisation is prone to chaos, known as entropy. In the unfortunate case that organisations find themselves in a crisis, they attempt to remedy the chaos by effecting rules and regulations. This effort refers to (seeking) equilibrium (Louw and Du Plooy-Cilliers: 2014: 30).

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Public relations and communications practitioners worldwide and in South Africa continuously find it challenging to effectively implement crisis communication techniques during crisis management in their respective organisations. Lando (2014: 5) warns that most organisations only have a broad Crisis Management Plan designed to overcome the actual crisis at hand. When it comes to disseminating communication to the various stakeholders, however, about the situation, many organisations are ill-equipped because they lack a Crisis Communication Plan.

There has been a significant rise in the number of motor manufacturing companies in South Africa that have recalled some of their 2007 to 2017 car models due to technical glitches that could result in the cars catching fire. It causes significant concern for the consumers' safety and the companies' reputation and credibility, making timeous and effective communication essential (Buthelezi, 2017: 1). For this reason, the purpose of this study was to assess the management and implementation of crisis communication at four car manufacturing companies. In particular, the researcher examined the existence and efficiency of implementing crisis management plans, crisis management teams and crisis communication strategies .

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to assess crisis communication techniques currently applied by the Public Relations and Communications Teams at selected car manufacturing companies in Gauteng, South Africa. Therefore, the study identified gaps in crisis communication techniques employed in these organisations, which will assist companies in better planning and implementing befitting strategies. Furthermore, the researcher identified gaps in the theories and processes used by organisations to match today's demands of the phenomena. As the world evolves, so do organisations and the issues and crises of the organisations. Therefore the employed crisis management mechanisms need to be amended to manage today's situations effectively and efficiently. Thus, the findings will benefit car manufacturing companies as they are all prone to crises as well as the Public Relations and Communication industry.

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To assess the crisis management plans at Companies A, B, C, and D.
- To determine the crisis communication monitoring and evaluation tools and techniques at Companies A, B, C and D.
- To evaluate the role that communication plays in a crisis.
- To identify crisis communication implementation challenges that the crisis management teams face in Companies A, B, C and D; and
- To make recommendations to improve crisis communication and management plans at the selected car manufacturing companies.

1.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE (RATIONALE) OF THE STUDY

Ashari, Ahmed, Samani (2017: 1), and Olawale (2014: 79) (as well as many other researchers) agree that crises are inescapable, irrespective of the nature of the business, and could threaten the reputation and livelihood of the company. It is an ongoing challenge for public relations and communications practitioners in various industries to successfully implement crisis communication successfully. In addition, many companies lack a Crisis Communication Plan, as per Lando (2014: 5). This study is, therefore, crucial as it assessed crisis communication in four organisations. Although this study involved car manufacturing companies, the findings and recommendations can benefit other organisations in countless industries. These companies can thus adapt this study to according to their needs to formulate and implement effective crisis communication mechanisms that are better suited for this ever-evolving business world.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher divided the literature review into two chapters. First, it focussed on the global and local background of crisis communication and crisis management. The researcher presented it by first discussing the sphere of public relations as it is a prerequisite for crisis communication and crisis management. Next, how a crisis develops, as a mere risk that turns into an issue and eventually matures, necessitated a discussion of crisis communication and crisis management, including the resolution requirements at each stage of the development of a situation.

Chapter three then provided the theoretical framework for crisis communication and management: The Systems Theory, Chaos Theory, and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). These behaviour change theories are vital as they explained how the organisations under a study conducted themselves when they experienced crises.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

1.6.1 Research Design

The methodology employed for this study is qualitative. According to Yin (2011: 6), qualitative research allows one to conduct in-depth studies regarding various topics. On the other hand, Ibrahim (2012: 39) stresses that qualitative research data collection is often dependent on interpretation, and therefore, the data necessitates several explanations. Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014: 1) further add that when analysing qualitative data, it is referred to as the process of analysing text. Therefore, the study is qualitative as the researcher required detailed, comprehensive information regarding crisis management and crisis communication at the selected companies.

1.6.2 Target Population and Scope

Population refers to a large group of people; the aggregate of all elements under study having one or more characteristics, the number of the population may be finite or infinite (Surbhi, 2016: 1). Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014: 132) cite Wiid and Diggenges (2013: 186), who refer to the target population as the entire group of individuals or entities, who have at least one common feature, from whom the researcher requires information. In other words, data will only be obtained from a sample of the population. The Crisis management teams were chosen as the target population because they actively attempt to remedy the crisis and interact with various organisational stakeholders. Eight crisis managers participated in the study.

1.6.3 Data Collection Methods

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to collect data as they allowed for further probing where necessary. One of the advantages of this interviewing technique is that, although there are predetermined questions, the interviewer had the option of modifying the order of the questions and the questions themselves where they saw the need.

The interviews primarily consisted of open-ended questions administered to the Crisis Management Teams. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and took about 40

minutes per session. The researcher recorded using a dictaphone for accurate findings, conclusions, and recommendations to be provided by the researcher. A dictaphone allowed the researcher to replay the interviews, which allowed more accurate analysis and recording of findings. In addition, case studies from credible sources were utilized as the researcher consulted relevant primary and secondary sources to assess the planning and management of crisis communication at Companies A, B, C, and D. These sources included but were not limited to company websites, newspaper articles and journals.

1.6.4 Data Analysis

Phruksahiran and Chandra (2013: 291) explain that data analysis gathers information reviewed and analysed by the researcher to form the findings and conclusions. According to Ibrahim (2012: 40), thematic analysis is a qualitative analysis illustrated in great detail. It analyses classifications and identifies themes (patterns) that relate to the data. Interpretations of the data then provide an opportunity to understand the potential of any issue more widely. In addition, the thematic analysis allows the researcher to precisely determine the relationship between concepts and compare them with the replicated data.

This study employed thematic analysis as content obtained from various case studies and interviews were critically analysed and interpreted to provide accurate conclusions and recommendations. Qualitative research requires excellent comprehension and data collection from diverse sources. The themes under which patterns were compared and contrasted in the various organisations were the crisis management plans, the role of communication in a crisis and crisis communication role players, monitoring and evaluation of communication tools and techniques, and constraints in crisis communication implementation. The researcher selected the themes based on the patterns that arose from the data analysis and literature review and used NVivo to further analyse the information.

1.6.5 Validity, Reliability and Credibility

Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2014: 253) state that people want to trust the researcher's credibility and findings in research. In qualitative research, the researcher uses the concept of trustworthiness to measure reliability and validity as it implies that the researcher is objective. Mohajan (2017: 14) agrees that qualitative research relies on validity which is about trustworthiness and dependability. The author then cites Singh (2014), who says validity and reliability increase transparency and decrease the likelihood of inserting the researcher's bias in qualitative research.

1.6.5.1 Validity

According to Mohajan (2017: 14), validity is how the research instrument measures what it asserts and measures. The results thus need to be truthful. Therefore, this study critically analysed crisis management and crisis communication literature from credible authors and conducted in-depth interviews with crisis management team members. The researcher used a dictaphone to record the interviews to replay the responses and present accurate data. The researcher also conducted a pilot test to ensure that the researcher asked valid questions.

1.6.5.2 Reliability

Mohajan (2017: 10) refers to reliability as a measurement that supplies consistent, precise, and trustworthy results. Issues arise when the researcher adopts a subjective approach to the study as reliability becomes compromised. The researcher devised the interview questions in a way that their answers achieved the set research objectives. The researcher remained objective at all times to attain reliable, accurate and consistent findings.

1.6.5.3 Credibility

Mohajan (2017: 14) stresses that instead of referring to validity and reliability, qualitative researchers should use the term credibility, which speaks to trustworthiness, consistency, and confirmability.

The researcher submitted letters of information containing a summary of the research before the participant organisations signed the consent letters. The letter contained information about the researcher and her qualifications. Also included in the letter was information regarding the supervisors and procedures taken to obtain data, any possible risks or discomfort (there were none projected for this research). The researcher also provided the benefits of the study and contact information for the participants to use should they have any questions or concerns.

Participation was purely voluntary, and the anonymity of the participants was guaranteed. It increased the researcher's trustworthiness to have confidence in the researcher and consequently provided truthful information.

1.6.6 Pilot Testing

Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2014: 15) emphasise that the chosen data collection methods or instruments must be pre-tested before actual data collection begins. This trial run is known

as a pilot test. The pilot test aims to eliminate any problems that the researcher may not have anticipated when designing the instrument. For this study, interview questions and an interview schedule were the research instrument, and they were pre-tested amongst a small group of public relations practitioners from another car manufacturing company. This pilot test was an essential step in the research process because it served to identify any problem areas and deficiencies in the research instrument to research with a more extensive study. The researcher also became comfortable with the interview procedure and edited questions accordingly where necessary.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical formality is an imperative element of research, and it includes seeking permission from participants before conducting data collection, guaranteeing confidentiality where required and presenting truthful information (Mohajan, 2017: 16). Therefore, before conducting interviews, the researcher sought ethical clearance from the Durban University of Technology, which assessed, amongst other requirements, fairness and honesty regarding the researcher's research instruments and methodology, the topic of study, and the orientation of the research. Additionally, the researcher conducted a pilot test to practically test the interview questions to ask ethical questions. Here, interviewees answered questions honestly and provided any concerns or uncertainties about the questions to be revised where applicable. The interview questions were also sent to the supervisors, experts in research and public relations and communication, for feedback. Furthermore, all sources used were acknowledged in Harvard referencing as plagiarism is a severe offence.

Participation was voluntary, and participant organisations were required to sign letters of consent and provide gatekeepers' letters written on the company letterheads and allowed the researcher to research with them. If they wished to, participants remained anonymous. The researcher informed participants that participating in the study was voluntary and anonymous.

1.8 THE DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher narrowed the scope of this study to the participants being members of the crisis management teams at certain car manufacturing companies in Gauteng at the companies' head offices, where they implement crisis management policies and

procedures. The research data collection method was a semi-structured questionnaire for in-depth interviews.

1.9 THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study focused on selected car manufacturing companies. It, therefore, cannot be generalised as the study aimed to assess planning and management of crisis communication specifically in the car manufacturing industry and especially at the organisations' head offices. Possible constraints included some participants not responding truthfully or pulling out of the voluntary answering of questions. As a result, it could distort the findings, conclusions and consequently the recommendations. Another constraint could have been the researcher not having the funds to travel from Durban to Gauteng to conduct face-to-face interviews.

1.10 THE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

1.10.1 Chapter One: Overview of the Study

Chapter one introduced the topic of the study, provided background and an outline of the study, which aimed to assess crisis management and crisis communication at Companies A, B, C and D.

1.10.2 Chapter Two: Literature Review- Background of Crisis Communication and Crisis Management

Chapter two contains the literature review where the researcher discussed the terms and information about crisis management and crisis communication from various authors. This chapter also provides case studies of the companies in question to provide illustrations, which justifies the need for this study.

1.10.3 Chapter Three: Literature Review- Theoretical Framework of Crisis Communication and Crisis Management

Chapter three discusses the various theories that organisations can utilise as the framework in their quest to manage crisis communication and crisis management. These theories are the Systems Theory, Chaos Theory, and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT).

1.10.4 Chapter Four: Research Methodology and Design

Chapter four describes the research methodology (qualitative) and the design (in-depth interviews and case studies) the researcher employed in the study.

1.10.5 Chapter Five: Research Results and Discussion

Chapter Five presents the results of the study. It includes a discussion and interpretation of the findings.

1.10.6 Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter six constitutes a summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations.

1.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced and contextualised the research problem, outlined the aim and objectives, and justified the need for the study to be conducted. Furthermore, it outlined the literature review, which underpins the study. In addition the researcher discussed the research methodology and design where the target population and scope was mentioned as well as data collection methods and data analysis. To ensure trustworthiness of the study, reliability, validity, credibility and pilot testing were mentioned. Ethical considerations were then discussed. The researcher then presented delimitations and limitations of the study. Lastly, an overview of the following chapters was introduced, which sets the foundation for this study. The next chapter thus proceeds to provide the theoretical underpinning for this study by discussing and illustrating the global and local background of crisis management.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a brief overview of this study. The researcher also presented the background of crisis management and the research problem. Also, the researcher discussed the study's aim objectives of the study. The study's rationale was justified, along with delimitations, limitations, and the research methodology and the data analysis techniques employed. Correspondingly, included in the overview were how the researcher will ensure the validity and reliability of presented information and their credibility as an ethical researcher. Finally, this chapter critically discusses the global and local background of crisis management. It is vital, due to globalisation permitting businesses to operate in multiple countries and the nature of crises knowing no bounds when it comes to the type of business or the country in which it operates, together with the rapid spread of information on a national scale and internationally.

Chapter Two, as the literature review, is structured as follows:

Firstly, as a professional and organisational department under which crisis management and crisis communication stem, it is imperative to provide an overview of public relations and its importance. Secondly, risks are a prerequisite for organisational success. However, they come with uncertainties that may turn into issues. Therefore, risk management, issues management and contingency planning are required to avoid the problems from developing proactively. Thus, the researcher discusses these phenomena. Unfortunately, issues develop into crises which are sometimes unavoidable. As such, the researcher discusses crisis management. Due to its nature of causing reputational damage to the organisation, the importance of communication during crisis planning and crisis management is highlighted, which results in effective crisis communication by the crisis communication team. Car recalls, as the focus of this study, are put into context as organisational crises. Lastly, the researcher provides case studies of the crises that took place at company A, B, C and D. These companies faced a grave concern when their 2007 to 2017 models experienced technical glitches, which presented possibilities of the cars catching fire.

2.2 AN OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

As seen in Figure 2.1 below, the public relations process are as follows: ongoing research, action, communication, and evaluation (RACE).

The Public Relations Process: RACE

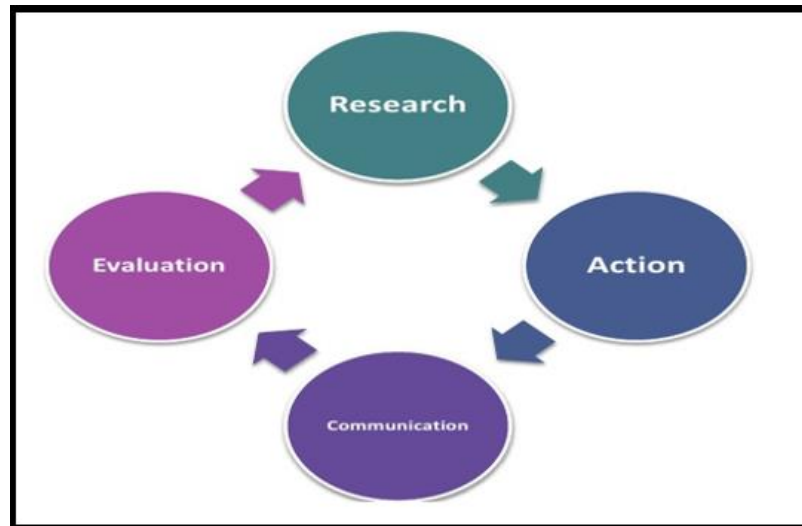


Figure 2.1 Public Relations as a Process: RACE (Survey of Public Relations Blog, 2016:1)

According to Skinner, Mersham and Benecke (2016: 2), public relations is a sophisticated, multi-faced discipline that assists in forging effective two-way communication between an organisation and its various stakeholders. It is dynamic, analytical, planned, implies action, requires evaluation and demands constant adjustment. Theaker (2016: 5) continues to cite the first World Assembly of Public Relations Associations (1978), which added that public relations is the art and social science of analysing trends, forecasting their outcomes, counselling organisational leaders, and implementing programmes of action that benefit the organisation as well as the public interest. Public relations (Theaker, 2016: 5) is art due to the significance of showing empathy and understanding. It also includes its role of storytelling and creativity. As a social science, public relations utilises techniques from psychology such as persuasion, and it is grounded in research and evaluation techniques. Once more, mutuality and a duty of care dominate these definitions.

Ngondo (2019: 3) stresses that South Africa is considered one of Africa's most prominent public relations markets. This author adds that the field has thus evolved into a management function that embraces social and digital media in its quest to link the organisation to its external environment through effective communication. Thurlow, Sévigny and Dottori (2018: 5) clarify that public relations as a management function necessitate taking policy decisions and being held accountable for the outcomes of public

relations programmes. As professionals engaging in organisational strategy formulation, public relations practitioners provide counsel and advice to the top management (Skinner, Mersham and Benecke, 2016: 2). It implies that public relations practitioners must constantly analyse the opinions and current trends in society, process these opinions regarding their likely effect on the organisation, and plan and execute an ethical course of action to secure its survival and success. Keller (2016: 629) stresses that a wise organisation takes concrete steps to manage fruitful relations with its vital public. Most organisations have a public relations department that monitors the attitudes and opinions of their publics and distributes information and communications to build goodwill, thus promoting and protecting the organisation's image.

Furthermore, the public relations department plays an imperative role in their respective organisations' crisis communication and management. Llorca and Cordero (2016: 41) affirm that the nature of business organisations is difficult to explain as they are complex and constantly changing entities. Due to the prevalence of crises, Jonker (2018:11) emphasises that crisis communication skills are among the most sought-after skills by managers in all industries. Theaker (2016: 5) refers to Harlow (1976: 36), who explains public relations as a distinctive function that assists in establishing and maintaining mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its stakeholders. It comprises managing issues or problems, helping management by informing and responding to public opinion, and defining and emphasising management's responsibility to serve the public interest. This function also includes supporting management in keeping abreast of and effectively adapting to change, thus serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends, using research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools. Based on these findings, keywords that can be associated with public relations are:

- **Management:** public relations does not just occur; it is intentional.
- **Mutuality:** public relations is not one-sided; it is reciprocal.
- **Stakeholders:** there are a variety of different types of publics with whom organisations build relationships
- **Responsibility and public interest:** There should be a broader duty of care internally and outside the organisation.

Public Relations Society of America (2022: 1) then emphasises public relations as strategic communication and a discipline that manages the organisational reputation to

earn understanding and support and influence opinion and behaviour. Furthermore, it is the planned and sustained effort to foster and retain goodwill and mutual understanding between the organisation and its publics. Thus, reputation is a core intangible organisational asset that gives the organisation a competitive advantage and helps it maintain valuable strategic relationships with stakeholders.

The NRAI School of Mass Media (2017: 8) ascertains that public relations and communication are inseparable. Public relations is about building and sustaining positive and mutually beneficial relationships through constant reciprocal communication between the organisation and its stakeholders.

2.2.1 The Roles and Functions of Public Relations

The primary roles and functions of the discipline are as follows (Jonker, 2018: 1): Crisis communication and crisis management; Evaluating public attitudes and opinions; Analysing and predicting issues and opportunities; Gathering information and monitoring trends; Formulating and implementing organisational procedures and policy regarding communication with its stakeholders; Coordinating communication and disseminating information; The development of rapport and goodwill through a two-way communication process; Development and nurturing a positive relationship between an organisation and its publics; and Advising and counselling policy-makers.

Based on the above-identified roles of public relations, areas of specialisation can thus be narrowed down to the following (Jonker, 2018: 1):

- Risk, Issues and Crisis Management.
- Reputation Management and Media Relations.
- Client relations and Employee relations; and
- Community relations.

There is, therefore, a need for public relations as it serves a wide variety of institutions, such as businesses, government agencies, hospitals, schools, religious institutions, foundations to build and maintain a positive corporate image. It is worth noting that all these areas of public relations specialisation are essential in crisis communication and crisis management, which means public relations are inseparable from the phenomena.

Proactive Crisis Management as a Key Public Relations Role

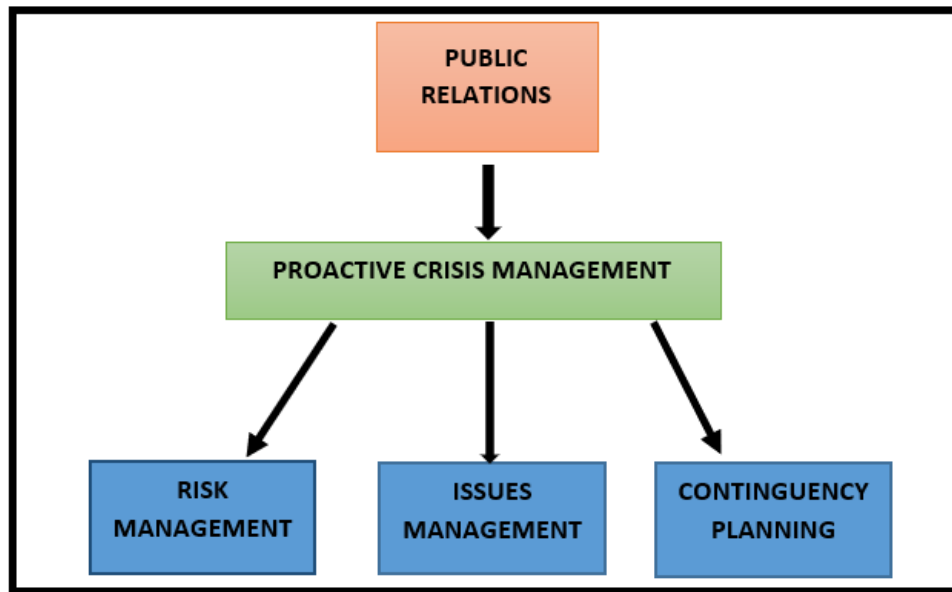


Figure 2.2 Proactive Crisis Management as a Key Public Relations Role (Martínez, Mejías, Quintas and Pardo (2012: 595-596)

When organisations are proactive in crisis management, they identify possible risks and issues, manage them, and put crisis contingency plans in place. Thus, being proactive necessitates risk management, issues management as well as contingency planning. The researcher discusses these concepts in the next section.

2.3 RISK MANAGEMENT, ISSUES MANAGEMENT AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING

Martínez, Mejías, Quintas and Pardo (2012: 595-596) detail that in the cutthroat business environment, all organisations aim to get a competitive advantage by getting and staying ahead of competitors. Significant advances automatically become a prerequisite and an efficient operation where organisational products and services are concerned. Many organisations, consequently, use projects as mechanisms to deliver such a competitive advantage. Likewise, for organisations to move ahead as quickly as possible, taking risks becomes inevitable. The business faces a range of uncertainties that determine whether the organisation achieves its sought-after goals. To be successful, organisations need to effectively manage uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, achieved through risk and issue management and contingency planning. The preceding paragraphs discuss risk management, issue management and contingency planning in detail.

2.3.1 Risk Management

Kenton (2020: 1) states that no organisation is exempt from risks, mainly because the causes may sometimes be external and are thus not easily identified or controlled. Business risk is when a company experiences factors that will lead to its decrease in profits or even failure. For example, when an organisation cannot achieve its financial goal, that is seen as a business risk. The sources of business risk are diverse but can range from changes in consumer taste and demand, the state of the overall economy and government rules and regulations. Similarly, Market Business News (2020: 1) states that risk refers to the probability or threat of loss, liability, injury, damage, or any other negative occurrence resulting from external or internal vulnerabilities and that may be prevented or avoided through preventive action. Consequently, risks are vital for organisational innovation, growth, and success, without which organisations will stagnate and fail.

Organisations can face two types of risks: a hazard is a more traditional and primary type of risk and includes fire, fraud or pollution and organisations can use to use cargo insurance as a means of risk management (Sadgrove, 2016: 9). Recently, however, risk can also be seen as entrepreneurial or as an opportunity for the organisation. For example, opening a new branch, launching a new product, or merging with another company can be wrong or right. Risk, for this reason, applies to management decisions that could either work for or against the organisational objectives (Sadgrove, 2016: 9). As stated previously, one of the critical elements of public relations is ensuring that the organisation adequately adapts to change by having an early warning system that utilises research and ethical communication mechanisms to anticipate trends. Risk management is thus reducing or eliminating the risks of certain kinds of unpleasant occurrences or impacting the business. It is about identifying, assessing, and prioritising risks (Najjaar, Yasseen and Small, 2017: 15).

Therefore, risk management is as much about identifying opportunities as it is about avoiding or mitigating losses. Assessing and managing risks is undeniably the best way to prepare for future progress and growth consequences. The critical elements of the continuous risk management process include risk identification, risk assessment, risk response action and risk monitoring. Smentowski (2017: 1) states that organisations that address risks within their automation infrastructure will likely protect their operations and reputation. For example, unaddressed risks in the automotive manufacturing operations can result in missed production targets, safety incidents and vehicle recall. Some risks

include safety hazards, ageing assets, and security threats that can negatively impact the organisation, including employees, income, plants, intellectual property, vehicle quality, and customers.

Risk management (Corporate Finance Institute, 2021: 1) entails logical and systematic approaches of establishing the context, identifying, analysing, evaluating, treating, monitoring, and communicating risks related to any activity, function or process in a way that will enable organisations to minimise losses and maximise opportunities. According to the Corporate Finance Institute (2021: 1), risk management is essential in its ability to empower organisations with the vital tools needed to identify and deal with possible risks adequately. Agreeably, risk management aids organisations with a basis upon which sound decision-making can take place. The Government of Western Australia (n.d.) adds that risk management is also a central component of good management and governance. It is an iterative process of steps that facilitate continuous decision-making improvement when undertaken in sequence.

A risk rating matrix can assess the likelihood of each risk against the severity or consequences of the hazard to determine the risk rating. The possibility is measured by whether an occurrence is rare, unlikely, possible, very likely, or inevitable. Consequences can be insignificant, minor, moderate, principal, or catastrophic- such as death or disability (Western Sydney University, 2018: 6). Furthermore, the organisation's brand and reputation can also suffer to a point where it erodes customer trust and loyalty. Organisations can improve risk management by focusing on critical areas, which are safety, quality, obsolescence, and security. Information on these key areas is presented below:

2.3.1.1 Safety

Safety is about the three C's- culture, compliance, and capital. Culture refers to behaviours. Compliance is about procedures, and capital is the technical aspect of safety (Smentowski, 2017: 1). Ali and Qader (2017: 386) stress that the safety of products is about reducing or eliminating potential harm that the product can cause. It entails informing the user how to use the products safely, as intended, and highlighting possible warnings. In addition, the product's safety translates to credibility, profitability, and a positive reputation for the organization (Smentowski, 2017: 1).

2.3.1.2 Quality

Product quality is the overall combination of product characteristics resulting from marketing, engineering, production, and maintenance strategies that meet customer expectations and thus increase the organisation's competitive advantage. The product quality components consist of performance, features, reliability, conformance, durability, serviceability, aesthetics, and perceived quality. Thus, quality significantly affects customer satisfaction and consumer loyalty (Yusuf, Nurhilalia and Putra, 2019: 19). One of the best ways to maintain quality is through real-time information visibility through modern manufacturing executive system (MES) software which captures information like visual defect tracking, root-cause analyses and controlling statistical processes. In addition, MES can help reduce the number of motor vehicle recalls as it offers forward and backward traceability for identifying upstream and downstream quality issues and providing product location (Smentowski, 2017: 1).

2.3.1.3 Obsolescence

According to Smentowski (2017: 1), manufacturing organisations must assess their assets by identifying risks as the obsolescence of equipment and software could result in downtime and loss of productivity. Thus, proactive management of product life-cycle is vital. An installed base evaluation (IBE) service is usually efficient (Rockwell Automation, 2022: 1) as it collects and aggregates both hardware and software data across numerous plants in weeks. The IBE also provides reports which offer guidance on where critical risks exist.

2.3.1.4 Security

According to Smentowski (2017: 1), security is about being more connected, meaning that data can get to machines and people in a secure manner. It requires conducting a security assessment where risks and vulnerabilities are clearly understood and identifying needed mitigation techniques. In addition, multiple layers of protection must be addressed at six different levels, namely: policy, device, physical, computer, network, and application. Lastly, manufacturers must work with legitimate vendors. In addition, in their White Paper for Automotive Security, Intel Security (2014: 5) highlights that vehicle safety, reliability, and security should begin at the design phase's onset. Organisations create a threat model

for the vehicle that anticipates different threats and seeks to mitigate them to ensure a secure design. While the safety designer adds crumple zones, airbags, proximity detection, and automatic braking systems, the security designer also builds layers of protection to isolate a threat before affecting vehicle operations. Figure 2.3 below summarises the process of risk management.

Risk Management Process

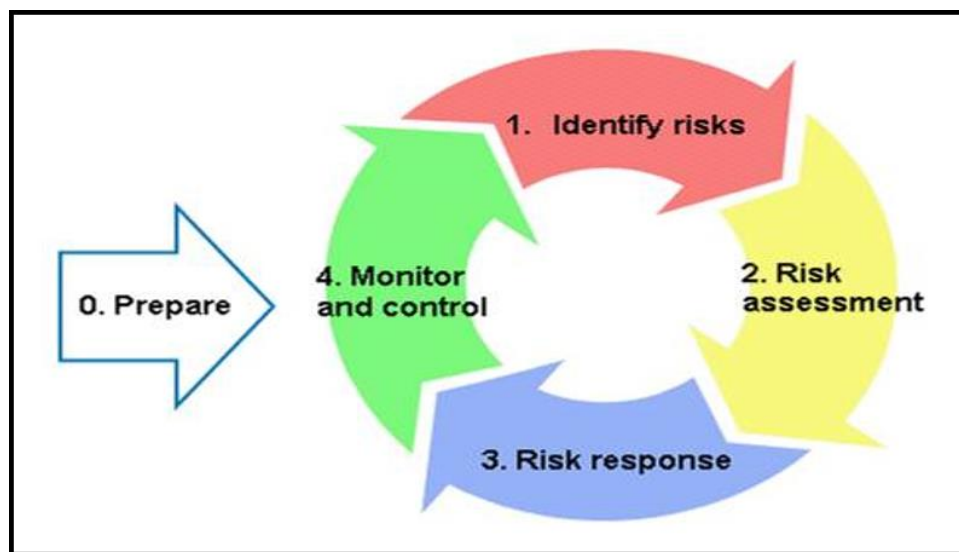


Figure 2.3 Risk Management Process (Jensen, n.d.)

The risk process, as seen above in Figure 2.3, has four stages (Jensen, n.d.):

The first stage is about **identifying the risks (and opportunities)**. It means detecting potential issues of concern for the organization (Walker, 2022: 1). For example, a trend could be a potential issue provided that it prompts possible organisational change. Unfortunately, at this stage, these hazards have not yet captured the public's attention, regardless of some critical stakeholders or experts being aware of them.

In the second stage, called **risk assessment** (PCubed, 2021: 1), the level of the issue's intensity increases as stakeholders advance the issues. Organisations evaluate the risks and prioritise based on their potential outcomes. Stakeholders try to legitimise the issue to foster more significant support from influencers to reinforce their position and public acceptance. Debates may be raised by the organisation, regarding the matter, through considerable dialogue. Frequent media coverage of the issue usually leads to more discussions and awareness of the case.

The third stage (Ray, 2021: 1) is about **responding to the risk** as it has matured into a crisis, showing its potential impact on the organisation. The public, significant influencers, and others recognise this issue's prominence and pressure governmental bodies and agencies to present formal restrictions to prevent or alter the organisation or industry's behaviour. Organisations may develop a policy as a response to the crisis.

After reaching the entire course of its life, organisations activate the fourth stage of **monitoring and control measures** by tracking identified risks and the results of efforts to combat the threats. Importantly, not all identified risks reach a crisis level as preventative measures may have worked early in the life cycle of the risk (Jensen, n.d; PCubed, 2021: 1).

2.3.2 Issues Management

According to Jensen (n.d.) when risks happen, they are called issues. Issues management can be considered a pre-crisis planning phase as the scanning and anticipation of emerging issues occur. Thus, crisis management comprises the potential, arising, and current stages of its progression before it reaches the crisis stage. An uncontrolled issue can turn into a crisis. Thus, effective crisis management lessens the probability of an organisation facing it. Figure 2.4 below illustrates the issues life cycle from its potential to its dormant stage.

Issues Life Cycle

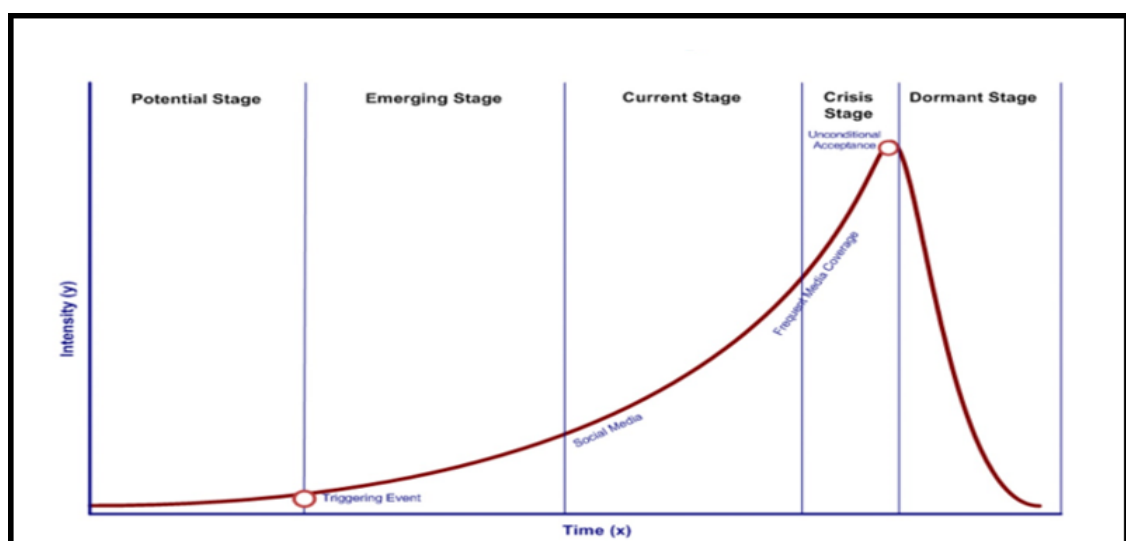


Figure 2.4 Issues Life Cycle (Meng, 2009: 1)

It is vital to understand the issues lifecycle before deciding on dealing with the issues. Figure 2.4 shows that problems begin as ideas of what stakeholders expect to affect the organisation and public, like risks. Awareness and reactions amplify its results. The issue lifecycle consists of four stages. Firstly, it begins as a **potential issue**. Then, due to environmental changes- political, economic, social and so on, trends occur and pose potential problems or opportunities for organisations. Specialists and academics tend to identify such trends early before capturing significant public and experts' attention.

Stage two is where the **issue emerges**, indicating a gradual increase in the level of pressure on the organisation to accept the case. This stage attracts a lot of media coverage. It calls for effective communication by the organisation regarding the issue. In the third stage, **the current stage**, the problem has matured and is now a crisis that requires a resolution. Lastly, the **dormant stage** represents the aftermath, where organisations usually alter their processes and policies (Al Jarery, 2019:4).

Risk management and issues management necessitate a contingency plan if the first proposed solution for risk or issue is not adequate.

2.3.3 Contingency Planning

A contingency plan is also called a backup plan or Plan B, an alternative plan the organisation intends to implement should an unwanted or unexpected situation arise. Risk management, issues management, project management and crisis management are significant areas of contingency planning. By raising and testing several "what if" scenarios, managers can collectively brainstorm and challenge their assumptions in a hypothetical environment that is not threatening before they decide on a particular course of action. This process allows for pressure testing of plans and forecasts and equips companies to better handle unexpected events better (Rigby, 2017: 50).

Uncontrolled risks may turn into issues or even crises, depending on the brutality of their consequences. An unattended issue can also progress and become a crisis (Sadgrove, 2016: 10). Thus, effective risk management, issues management and contingency planning are paramount for crisis prevention or reducing crisis and crisis result severity.

2.4 A CRISIS AS AN ORGANISATION'S REPUTATIONAL THREAT

Bozkurt (2018: 60) defines corporate image as the feelings, thoughts, and perceptions to initially come to stakeholders' minds at the mention of an organisation. A good or positive

corporate image or reputation necessitates organisations being transparent and open with their communication and the way they operate. It includes communicating with stakeholders about crises as soon as they occur or develop. As a continuously competitive environment, modern society has led to organisations competing over their products and services and an excellent corporate image. Having an excellent organisational reputation is synonymous with being reliable, respectable, and credible. Agreeably, corporate reputation or image reflects people's perception of the organisation, say Argenti and Druckenmiller (2004) in Sandu (2015).

Olawale (2014: 79) cites Pas (2011: 1), who defines crisis as an inherently abnormal, unstable, and intricate situation that could threaten the strategic objectives, reputation or existence of an organisation. The author further cites Perrow (2014: 1), who refers to a crisis as a critical state of affairs that has the potential of causing severe negative consequences to the organisation. Ashari, Abang Ahmed, and Samani (2017: 1) agree that a crisis could implicate an organisation in ways that could lead to economic and reputational challenges. Thus (Marketing91, 2019: 1), an organisational is a sudden and unforeseen occurrence that leads to restlessness amongst individuals in an organisation.

A synthesis of the above definitions implies that a crisis is any occurrence that leads to instability and hazardous situations and affects a community, a group of people, or society. There is an element of surprise when a crisis occurs, and problems often happen at short notice and trigger fear and threat, resulting in a sequence of unexpected events. Therefore, a crisis creates a situation requiring a practical decision, although time is short.

Zamoum and Gorpe (2018: 204) maintain that every crisis creates a need for information and only communication fulfils that need. Thus, management must not ignore the crisis management plan nor the crisis communication before, during and after the crisis. A crisis implicates a period of discontinuity, a situation where core organisational values are under threat and critical-decision making is required. The organisation and its stakeholders become destabilised during a crisis: one or more issues, errors, or procedures may potentially escalate during this period. Coombs (2007: 163) refers to crises as threats to the organisational reputation and can affect how stakeholders interact with the organisation. Three elements shape the reputational threat: initial crisis responsibility, crisis history and prior relational reputation.

According to Tripp (2016: 25), **Initial crisis responsibility** measures how much stakeholders believe the organisation is responsible for the crisis. It speaks to whether the stakeholders believe it was accidental, preventable or if the organisation is also a victim. **Crisis history** and **prior relational reputation** refer to whether the organisation has previously had indiscretions or is in good standing with its publics. A good track record can protect the organisation's reputation, and adversely, having a history of crises can work against the organisation. Olawale (2014: 80) further affirms that every organisation inevitably experiences a crisis at some point. Its impact could induce severe consequences such as threatening the organisation's operations, reputation, and even survival. Thus, the organisation's ability to effectively craft strategies that will assist it in managing these crises differentiates them from those who cannot handle such instability. Therefore, management must ensure that disasters do not occur or minimise the impact of critical situations.

The main elements of a crisis are as follows (Tripp, 2016: 25; Olawale 2014: 80):

- It poses an imminent threat to the organisation and its survival;
- It involves an element of shock or surprise; and
- Due to the severity of the problem and its unexpected nature, the situation places pressure on the organisation to make timely and effective decisions.

Knowing these elements which make up an organisational crisis can be instrumental in identifying these problems before it's too late for the organisation. Moreover, it will translate to effective crisis management in the organisation.

2.4.1 Categories of Crises

Skinner *et al.* (2016: 278) identify three main categories of crises: immediate crises, emerging crises, and sustained crises. An **immediate crisis** occurs suddenly and unexpectedly and is thus the most dreaded as there is little or no time to conduct research or plan. For example, burning an organisation's building or an employee's sudden death counts as an immediate crisis. An **emerging crisis** allows for research and planning and includes things like general employee dissatisfaction, which could have severe consequences for the organisation should it not be addressed timeously. Lastly, a **sustained crisis** persists over months or years, regardless of its efforts to combat it. Ongoing retrenchment falls under this category.

Tripp (2016: 14) adds a fourth category of ***social media or social-mediated crisis***. Social media initiates or amplifies this crisis (one of the organisational communication channels) and results in undesirable media coverage, a change in the corporate process and possible financial loss. Skinner *et al.* (2016: 41) add that social media now allows millions of ordinary people to comment about organisations' products and services, with implications for online reputation management.

Organisations can thus embrace an organisational culture dedicated to customer success and employ people closely aligned with the corporate values. These values should embrace flexibility and adaptability. Organisations also need to eliminate or decrease, as much as possible, the severity of unfavourable crisis effects through crisis management.

2.5 CRISIS MANAGEMENT

According to De Wolf and Mejri (2013: 71), crisis management aims to assist the organisation in managing the crisis and minimising its negative impacts. It is a process of identifying a threat and mounting an effective response to it. Due to the unpredictability of global events, organisations tend to try and identify possible crises before they occur to sketch out how they can best deal with them.

To reduce or prevent damage, the organisation needs to have a regularly updated crisis management plan (CMP) and a spokesperson who prepares draft crisis messages (Zamoum and Gorpe, 2018: 204). It necessitates that (Coombs, 2007: 39) the primary concern during a crisis is public safety, which requires quickness and accuracy from crisis managers. Condit (2014: 1) stresses that before it strikes, organisations should consider how a disaster would impact employees, consumers, suppliers, the public in general, as well as the value of the organisation. Because a crisis can strike any organisation anytime and anywhere, advanced planning is key to the survival of any organisation. Thus, as seen in the next diagram, seven critical steps of crisis management that every organisation should have in place, regardless of its size, are identified. Figure 2.5 on the next page illustrates the mandatory crisis management steps to follow.

Crisis Management Steps

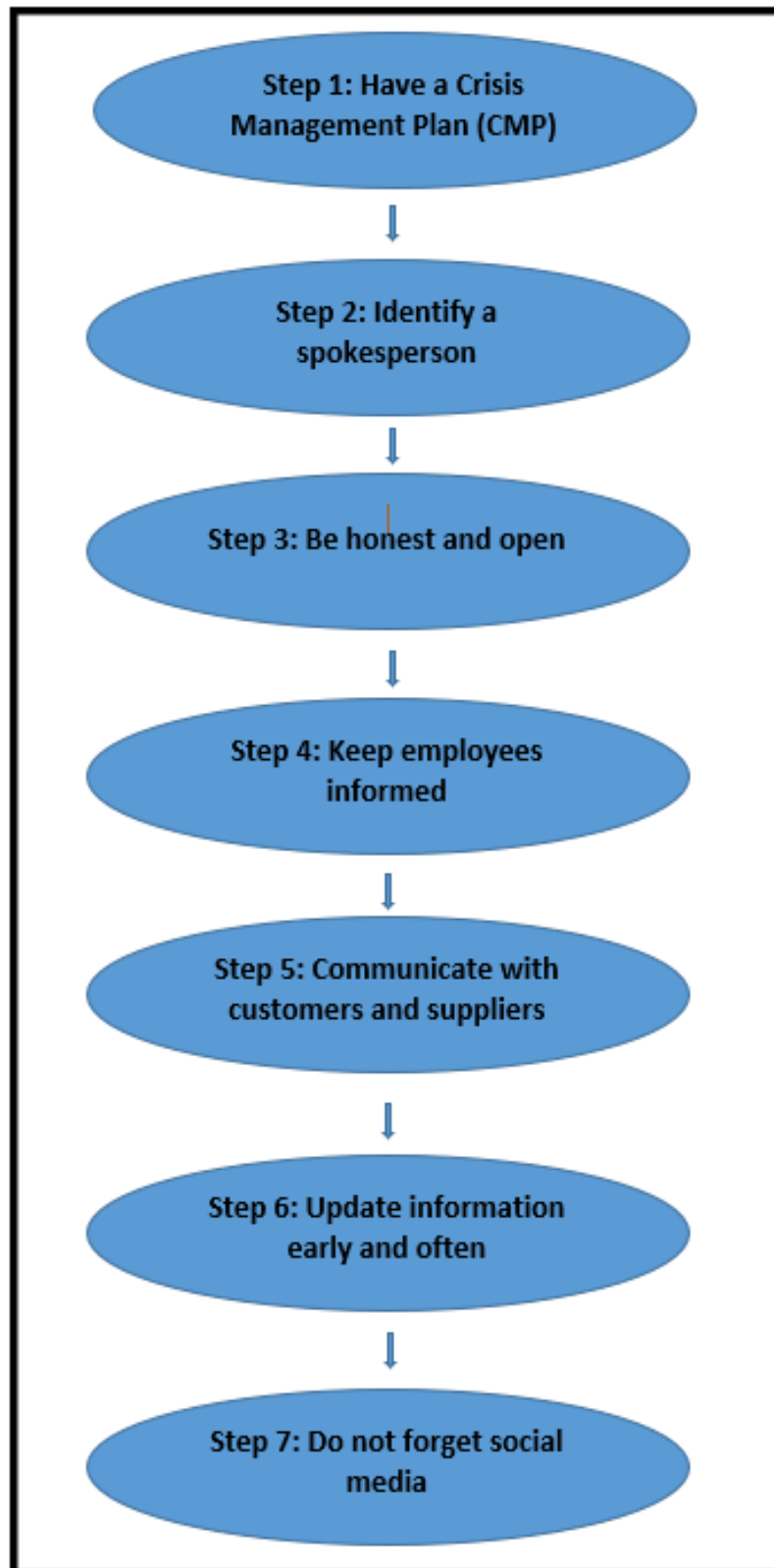


Figure 2.5 Crisis Management Steps (Condit, 2014: 1)

The above steps of crisis management, as seen in Figure 2.5, are elaborated on below.

Step one: Have a Crisis Management Plan (CMP)

A plan begins with clear objectives which aim to protect all individuals potentially endangered during a crisis. In addition, the organisation must aim at ensuring that key stakeholders are informed and that the organisation survives. Such plans should be written down and should include specific actions taken in the event of a crisis (Paquin, 2020: 1).

According to Rouse (2018: 1), when a crisis occurs, proactive, rapid, and comprehensive communication is imperative. Thus, an organisation should have a crisis communication plan that establishes a framework for disseminating information to all stakeholders affected by the situation. Without a CMP, which has crisis communication best practices, people may respond inappropriately or incorrectly. It may lead to safety being threatened and rumours spreading. Due to the organisation's reputation being at stake when it faces a crisis, it is vital to impart information to the public to ease any concerns and counter false information. Crisis communication strategies remain a crucial element of business continuity and disaster recovery. Thus an organisation should assume it will experience a crisis for better planning to occur.

Similarly, Reissová, Žambochová and Sláma (2018: 1) say the interest of consumers decreases once they have any doubts about a product's quality, especially when the doubts involve real-life impact on human health and lives. Ideally, organisations must prevent all potential crises. However, that is not always possible. Nonetheless, a well-managed organisation should anticipate as many probable risks as possible as part of its risk management process. Once management identifies (Payton, 2021: 40) the first symptom, a crisis management team should be immediately stabled, developing a crisis management plan. Each crisis plan must respect the principles of crisis communication. There is a need to clearly define competencies and responsibilities regarding who will communicate on behalf of the organisation, the means to be selected (especially printed mass media and electronic mass media), and what should be shared (the content).

The World Health Organization (2017:3) suggests that the following elements should be present in an effective overall crisis communication plan:

- **The Background**

Management should present a situational analysis, where challenges, strengths and weaknesses relating to the crisis are included (World Health Organization, 2017:3).

- **Goals**

The goals are generally to inform, persuade, motivate or achieve mutual understanding about issues that relate to the crisis (World Health Organization, 2017:3).

- **Objectives**

Objectives should be focused on the audience and be measurable. Two to three statements that will support the achievement of organisational goals should be defined. For example, to be informational by providing awareness and being motivational and action-oriented (World Health Organization, 2017:3).

- **Target Audiences**

Management must define specific groups to direct communications messages. These can include the media, employees, society, opinion leaders and so on. Management must prioritise audiences in order of importance (World Health Organization, 2017:3).

- **Message**

Organisations must pinpoint what they want the target audience to hear and retain, including the risks and benefits of the crisis. It is crucial to design essential information to be communicated. The organisation should think of general conceptual messages. The messages should be concise. It is helpful to develop three key messages for each target audience or each anticipated question, each with some supporting facts. The critical questions for the messages are: what do audiences need to hear? About what? And what do you want them to do? (World Health Organization, 2017:3).

- **Strategy**

The strategy is a plan of action that provides guidelines and themes for the overall effort. Communications tools used to implement strategies may include news releases, social media, brochures, radio announcements, press conferences and media interviews. Organisations should ensure that communications tools are appropriate for each audience. If time permits, materials and messages should be pre-tested with members of the target audience in advance (World Health Organization, 2017:3).

- **Time Frame**

A timetable that shows the start and completion of each communication strategy must be developed (World Health Organization, 2017:3).

- **Budget**

The organisation needs to define how much it will cost to implement the communications plan. In addition, a contingency or emergency budget must also be considered (World Health Organization, 2017:3).

- **Monitoring**

Management must describe monitoring mechanisms. Not only to monitor progress and adjust activities accordingly but also to monitor public and media opinion about the crisis and detect new misperceptions and rumours that you may need to respond to (World Health Organization, 2017:3).

- **Evaluation**

Management should establish an evaluation criterion that is realistic, credible, and specific. The crisis requires excellent communication. Time is an issue. Stakeholders are involved, and efficient communications can mitigate or escalate it. Building on the overall communications plan, a set of unique considerations concerning crisis communications need to be prepared, either as part of the communications plan or as an annexure (World Health Organization, 2017:3).

The World Health Organization (2017: 4) thus further suggests the following special considerations for crisis communication planning:

- **Contingencies**

Organisations need to consider worst-case scenarios and develop response strategies. The plan must be flexible enough to accommodate different situations. Management must define preventative actions, as well as mitigation activities. Preventive measures may include monitoring public opinion and responding to new misperceptions of the crisis, establishing relations with the media and key stakeholders, and building their knowledge (World Health Organization, 2017: 4).

- **First Step Actions**

An organisation needs to define communications actions that can be taken within a few hours of the crisis, taking national, regional, and local levels into account. Preparations may include (World Health Organization, 2017: 4).

- **Holding Statements**

Organisations must prepare statements for initial media encounters in most types of crises. For example, the organisation may express sympathy and affirm its commitment to using available resources to investigate the unfortunate incident and provide prompt feedback (World Health Organization, 2017: 4).

- **Decision-making and information release authority**

Organisations must ensure that the crisis communication plan has a signed endorsement from senior management, such as directors and senior managers. Organisations must also define information approval mechanisms during a crisis (who releases what, when and how) and procedures for information verification and expedited clearance (World Health Organization, 2017: 4).

- **Roles and Responsibilities**

Management must define clear roles and responsibilities during a crisis. It includes guidance on coordination and collaboration between stakeholders representing different ministries and institutes and with varying areas of expertise. In addition, management must identify a designated spokesperson (to whom everybody else refers journalists), coordinate activities, and liaise with critical internal and external stakeholders (World Health Organization, 2017: 4).

- **Information Sharing**

Organisations must then define the information-sharing formula with critical stakeholders, media, and the public at large. Management must consider different routes to reach different audiences (e.g. face-to-face, announcements, web). Management must also address mechanisms to ensure media inquiries are appropriately defined. They must also consider the media's needs (deadlines and ease of obtaining information). All media outlets must have access to updated information and methods to get answers (World Health Organization, 2017: 4);

- **Monitoring Public Opinion**

It includes guidance on monitoring public response (such as via social media or a hotline) to ensure an immediate response if warranted to any development, event or misperception (World Health Organization, 2017: 4); and

- **Contacts**

Lastly, organisations must prepare and continuously update lists with media contact information (national and local), including after-hours news desks, members of the crisis response team's after-hours contact numbers, and other relevant stakeholders (World Health Organization, 2017: 4).

Step two- Identify a spokesperson

If a crisis poses the health or well-being of customers, the general public or employees, it may attract media attention. A spokesperson then needs to be appointed to ensure an organisation communicates with one voice and delivers a clear, consistent message. Therefore, the identified spokesperson needs to be prepared to answer media questions and take part in interviews (Payton, 2021: 40). According to Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2018: 1), for people to listen to the organisation's message, trust the given advice, and act on recommendations, the spokesperson needs to possess the following qualities: empathy and care; competence and expertise; honesty and openness; commitment and dedication; and accountability.

The spokesperson must (CDC, 2018: 1) firstly demonstrate care, concern and compassion when communicating, accepting and involving the public as a legitimate partner. It requires spokespersons to listen to the people affected by the crisis to reveal the information needed and better deliver messages. Secondly, the spokesperson's credibility necessitates education and experience, but also, the spokesperson needs to tailor messages in such a way that complex information is easily understood. It may require limiting jargon and acronyms. Coordination and collaboration with other credible sources are also mandatory. Thirdly, organisations should provide explanations about how the organisation acquires its information. Also, management must meet the needs of the public and media to demonstrate availability and transparency. Fourthly, management must ensure that information is regularly updated honestly regarding the progress and challenges. Fifthly, management must ensure that they keep their promises and analyse progress regularly to improve the organisation's communication. The right spokesperson makes the organisation a trusted resource for reliable information during emergencies (CDC, 2018: 1).

Step three- Be honest and open

Nothing breeds more negative media coverage than a lack of honesty and transparency from an organisation. Hence, being as truthful and transparent as possible can assist in ending rumours and diffuse media frenzy. Therefore, management must project transparency through all communication channels, including news interviews, social media, internal announcements, etc. (CDC, 2018: 1).

As the professional body for public relations and communication professionals, the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) provides a code of ethics that members must comply with. In the code of ethics, PRISA (2017: 1) states that PRPs should commit to ethical practices, which implies preserving public trust.

Step four- Keep employees informed

Sustaining informed personnel helps ensure that business continues to operate as efficiently as possible. It also decreases the internal rumour mill, leading to the workforce posting incorrect reports on social media (Perkbox, 2021: 1). Heathfield (2021: 1) highlights the importance of employees in any organisation as they account for the most significant number of human resources in an organisation. Employees are the ones who physically carry out the organisation's work, implementing the plans set out by the management. Ultimately, the organisation's performance is dependent on how efficiently employees perform. Thus, employees can be called the backbone of an organisation, and healthy, well-trained, knowledgeable, motivated employees help prosper and grow the organisation. The required traits in an employee include integrity, teamwork, and commitment. Employees also need to have a positive attitude, be loyal, active listeners, be disciplined, punctual, and maximise available training and development opportunities.

Step five- Communicate with customers and suppliers

The last thing an organisation wants is for customers and suppliers to learn about their crisis through social media. Information should come from the organisation itself first. As part of their crisis communication plans, an organisation should include customers and suppliers and be updated regularly during the event (World Health Organization, 2017: 4).

Step six- Update information early and often

It is best for an organisation to over-communicate rather than allow false information to fill the void. It means organisations must issue summary statements and update action plans and new developments as early and often as possible. In addition, organisations must remember that due to today's social media and online news outlets, we live in a 24/7 news cycle. Thus their crisis plan must also do the same (World Health Organization, 2017: 4).

Step seven- Do not forget social media

Social media is undoubtedly one of the most vital channels of communication. Organisations thus need to establish a social media monitoring team to monitor and post and respond to social media activity throughout the crisis. Should an organisation fail to manage it effectively, it may diminish decades of hard work in a matter of hours. On the other hand, when an organisation handles a crisis efficiently, it confirms that it has efficient processes and procedures to address almost any possible issue. It is vital to note that media plays an essential role in crisis communication as crisis information production and dissemination are critical for preparedness, response, and recovery. However, communication professionals still find it challenging to engage the public using traditional and social media (Austin and Jin, 2018: 1).

Hung-Baesecke and Bowen (2018: 74) posit that during a crisis, the public, affected stakeholders, and the media are eager to attribute accountability to the inactive publics online and offline. Like influential social media creators, opinion leaders share and broadcast information about crises to their followers indirectly. Therefore, organisations should ethically evaluate the best crisis response approach, ensuring that the public interest is as essential as the organisation. Austin and Jin (2018: 60) then suggest that crisis management can also be called crisis preparedness which includes the development of risk assessment, preparing, and continuously reviewing the organisational crisis manual, having a crisis communication plan, selecting members of the crisis management team and having a training plan for the selected members.

During risk assessment, online issues should take priority based on the probability of their occurrence and possible impact on the organisation. A crisis manual must then include an updated list of links to those sources of information that must be monitored, such as specific blogs, opinion leaders and activists' websites and online communities. The manual should also include clear guidelines for using social media appropriately in the event of a crisis. It consists of a suitable tone and language when addressing online critics. Ethical

online and offline communication keywords are duty, dignity, respect, intention, transparency, openness, disclosure, and honesty (Jin, 2018: 60).

Page Center Training (2019c: 1) agrees and adds that, according to Coombs (n.d.), recommendations that the initial crisis response should be quick, precise, and consistent. Quickness and precision are vital for organisational and public safety because slow or inaccurate responses can escalate the risk, leading to injuries and even deaths, depending on the type of risk. Taking actions can also inhibit additional damage and protect the organisation's reputation by proving that the organisation has control over the situation. In addition, the organisation can maintain accuracy or precision in a crisis by speaking with one voice constantly.

It is, once again, stressed (Jonker, 2018: 2) that due to the nature of media of being drawn to crises as well as being able to reach a wide array of publics quickly, it is logical for the establishment of media relations as a critical component of crisis management. In addition, crisis managers should express sympathy for the crisis victims. It does not translate to the admission of guilt, however organisations who do so tend to experience less reputational damage. The following section will therefore discuss the various types of crisis management.

2.5.1 Types of Crisis Management

When a crisis breaks, the organisation should work on a statement immediately, briefly providing confirmed details and the following steps. Once the statement is prepared, the organisation decides whether it should be released proactively or responsively (reactively) (Bernstein, n.d).

Fontanella (2019: 1) then goes on to distinguish between three types of crisis management, namely:

2.5.1.1 Proactive Crisis Management

When organisations anticipate a potential crisis and work to prevent or prepare for them, proactive crisis management, things like building an earthquake-resistant office and distributing evacuation plans with employees fall under this crisis management category, where organisations prepare for natural crises. Although not all can be prevented or planned for, actively monitoring for possible threats to the organisation can assist the company in reducing the impact. Therefore, risk management, issues management, and

contingency planning are critical elements of being proactive when managing possible crises (Fontanella, 2019: 1). In agreement, Smith (2021: 1) states that the founding principle of proactive crisis planning has a plan in the first place. It outlines the organisation's activities when faced with a crisis, and guaranteeing business continuity is the primary goal.

The plan must pay particular attention to what drives the business and what needs to be protected when threatened for any reason. When the organisation has fully developed this plan, it must communicate it to everyone concerned and prepare its workforce for using it should the need arise. Proactive crisis management is dependent on a well-trained workforce knowing their roles and responsibilities. Employees must know how to act when required and understand how their part fits the overall plan. People must also know when and how to escalate any issues speedily and efficiently to designated colleagues, including non-working hours. Finally, management must choose a crisis team to focus on, analyse the issues, and identify suitable solutions (Smith, 2021: 1).

Harrington (n.d.) adds that a proactive release is immediately available to the public in releasing statements. For example, it could be in a press conference or posting a message on the organisation's website or social media platforms. It may also entail proactively contacting journalists with whom the organisation has good relations to provide them with the statement ahead of the story breaking.

A proactive statement is likely to be required if (Harrington, n.d.): The incident has already occurred, attracting traditional or social media attention. For example, the organisation must issue a statement when there are injuries or obvious jeopardising of the safety of people, there has been environmental contamination, or the incident has already attracted local or global attention. On the other hand, a reactive or responsive approach means that the statement is ready but placed on hold for publishing.

2.5.1.2 Responsive Crisis Management

When a crisis occurs, it is vital to have a plan of action ready that matches the situation at hand. Responsive crisis management is thus the act of executing that plan and handling any unexpected obstructions that may arise. It includes communicating with stakeholders, keeping employees informed, and creating adaptive solutions. Management uses this type of crisis management in financial and personnel crises where timely responses are of

utmost importance (Fontanella, 2019: 1). Agreeably, VP Legacies (2019: 1) states that responsive crisis management means a plan is already in place for handling various crises the organisation might face. In addition, such procedures should include clear guidelines and protocols regarding who must respond to the external stakeholders.

2.5.1.3 Recovery Crisis Management

Sometimes (Fontanella 2019: 1), organisations do not even see a crisis coming, and it is thus too late to prevent the consequent damages caused. Technological and personnel crises, for example, can usually blindside a business and generate long-term, adverse effects. In such instances, an organisation may not minimise the impact but rather salvage the situation. Organisations can then use recovery crisis management to publish a public apology and research the causes of the unforeseen crisis. Berg, Buesing, Gupta, and Jacobson (2020: 1) stress that revisiting and implementing practices and policies that help stakeholders feel safe and cared for is mandatory. Sending out thoughtful, personalised messages to affected stakeholders as soon as possible is also of utmost importance. This maintenance of engagement is critical to sustain the relationships and address the most common essential issues.

Van den Hurk (2015: 1) then emphasizes that recovery crisis management aims to transform the organisation from being in a state of a crisis to resuming normal business operations while rebuilding confidence and trust in the organisation. It is the phase where organisations learn from their experiences. First, management must recognise staff for their efforts during the crisis. The crisis response team then needs to review and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the crisis communication. Next, it requires staff to be debriefed, going through the timeline of events and actions taken. The team asks what worked, what did not work and why. Honesty is of vital importance. Lastly, management must assess the opinions of the critical stakeholders and the public at large to devise a relevant recovery plan.

Figure 2.6 on the following page illustrates the crisis communication process and includes the different types or stages of crisis management.

Crisis Management Process

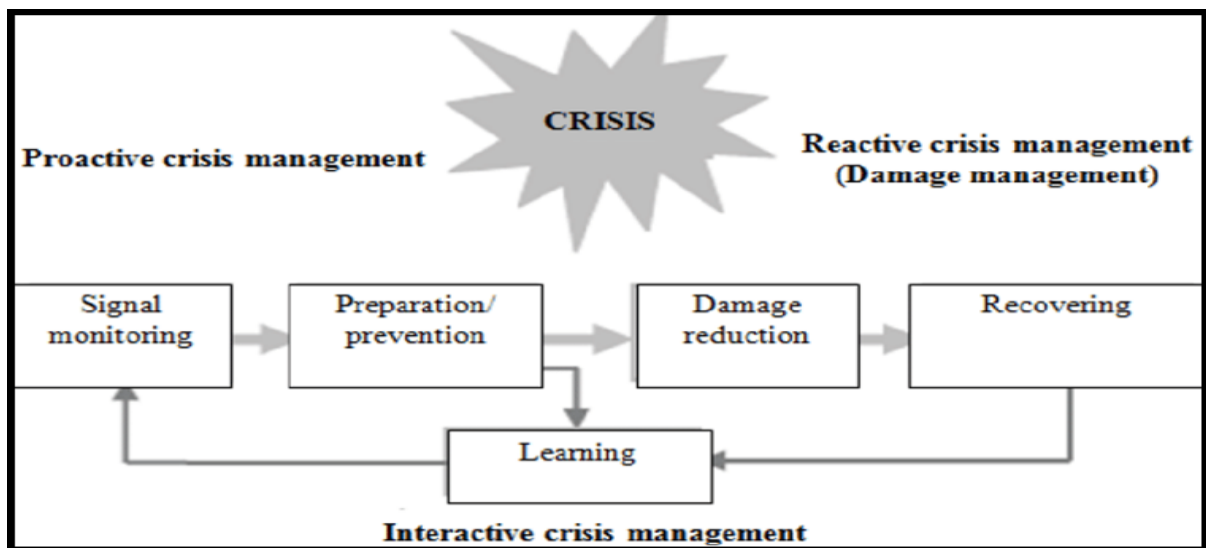


Figure 2.6 Crisis Management Process (Research Gate, 2017)

According to Figure 2.6, there are three categories of the crisis management process: proactive, reactive, and interactive forms. **Proactive crisis management** centres on crisis prevention through monitoring early warning signs, preparing for potential catastrophes and preventing crises. Should such efforts prove insufficient, reactive or responsive, crisis management thus minimises the crisis's consequences. It is also known as damage management as it has occurred, necessitating damage control. The aim here is to reduce the amount of damage that has happened and recover as an organisation. **Finally, interactive or recovery crisis management** is employed where lessons help equip future crisis planning. Thus, effective crisis management is a continuous progression of learning.

2.5.2 The Responsibilities of Crisis Managers

At each stage of the crisis life, the crisis managers have distinct responsibilities to handle as indicated below:

2.5.2.1 Before the Crisis

Blokhina (2020: 12) summarises the roles of crisis managers before the crisis into two categories- prevention and preparation. Preparation involves adopting a crisis management mindset by assembling a crisis management team, organisational values and strategies disseminated across the organisation, and hypothetical crises simulated using a crisis management plan. Where prevention is concerned, the aim is to reduce known risks that could escalate.

Kadarova, Markovič and Mihok (2017: 61) elaborate on the responsibilities by indicating that crisis managers must:

- Process and adopt a comprehensive crisis management strategy in alignment with organisational development ;
- Build a crisis management system and continuously adjust it as per the altering internal and external conditions ;
- Identify potential crises and their potential consequences ;
- Prepare solutions to identified potential crises, methodological processes and activity plans;
- Elaborate on crisis team members' tasks;
- Carry out practice drills;
- Organise training for the crisis management team and other employees; and
- Continuously monitor the potential crises.

2.5.2.2 During the Crisis

According to Blokhina (2020: 1), the main aspects of crisis management are detection and mitigation. It requires the identification of opportunities for early warning of evolving threats and the identification or development of a reporting mechanism of data to be reported. Furthermore, management must take actions to reduce negative impact to the minimum possible.

Kadarova, Markovič and Mihok (2017: 61) further elaborate that if the potential crisis matures, crisis managers should:

- Introduce the crisis management system based on the preliminary crisis information;
- Acquire supplementary information on the crisis;
- Conclude the official spokesperson and report provided to the media and the public ;
- Stop the spread of panic by regularly providing all stakeholders with sufficient information;
- Adopt preventative measures against crisis escalation; and
- State what has been and is in the offing to end the crisis and remedy the situation.

2.5.2.3 After the Crisis

Blokhina (2020: 13) says crisis managers must take action to speed up the process of recovery from a crisis. Organisations need to continue with critical business processes even after being in crisis mode. Once it has reached its dormant state, crisis managers, therefore, need to:

- Analyse the extent to which their solutions to resolving the issues were realised and propose further steps
- Modify the initial crisis plan where necessary
- Ensure more intensive and comprehensive monitoring of risks
- And ensure that the organisation resumes its daily activities or reaches the organisational goals and objectives (Kadarova, Markovič and Mihok, 2017: 62).

Effective crisis communication remains the most crucial part of crisis management's responsibilities. Quadros (2020: 1) reiterates the importance of employees as the first line of defence in a crisis. Therefore, it necessitates crisis managers to communicate with their teams early, honestly and often. In addition, crisis managers need to keep their teams motivated for crisis management to occur effectively and efficiently.

2.6 THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN CRISIS PLANNING AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Managers need to define communication, explain the purpose, and the process. As mentioned before, communication is required for effective crisis planning and crisis management to result because communication is central to these processes.

2.6.1 Defining Communication

Communication is interaction within a social context where the aim is to have a common understanding of a message between a source (also known as the sender) and a receiver. Fatimayin (2019: 1) cites the following definitions:

Communication is the process of creating meaning as well as ascribing it. It is the exchange of ideas and interaction among group members (Giffin and Patten, 1976: 1).

Communication is the activity or process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information. Therefore, one can safely say that communication is the act of

transferring information and messages from one place to another and from one person to another (The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, 2004: 1).

In a related manner, the Online Business Dictionary describes communication as a two-way process. It involves participants reaching a mutual understanding beyond merely encoding and decoding information, news, ideas, and feelings. It is essential that they also create and share the meaning contained in the messages passed (Daniel, 2013: 1). In addition to this, communication is a means of connecting people or places. It is also regarded as an essential key function of management because an organisation cannot operate without communication between levels, departments, and employees (Online Business Dictionary, 2010: 1; Okenimkpe, 2010: 1).

A synthesis of the above definitions suggests that communication transfers information from one person to the next and receives constant feedback until a mutual understanding of the message between the sender and the receiver. Important to note is that no organisation can function without communication.

2.6.2 The Purpose of Communication

Effective communication is the lifeblood of organisations and relationships in general (Management Study Guide, 2021: 1). Communication plays a crucial role in altering an individual's attitudes. For example, a well-informed individual will have a better perspective than a less-informed individual. Organisational magazines, journals, meetings, and other oral and written communication help mould stakeholders' attitudes and behaviours. An effective and efficient communication system requires managerial proficiency in delivering and receiving messages. A manager must (Zink, 2022: 1) discover various barriers to communication, analyse the reasons for their occurrence and take preventive steps to avoid those barriers. Thus, the primary responsibility is to develop and maintain an effective communication system in the organisation.

2.6.3 The Communication Process

The two-way communication process involves the transmission of a message from a sender to a receiver and back. Communication may take place through speech, hand signals, written or other forms. All communication involves eight steps, regardless of the format used. The elements or steps of the communication process are (National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management, n.d.: 6):

Developing an idea: The sender must have a clear idea of what they want to convey to the sender; **Encoding the message:** The sender then puts this message in code form. The sender then chooses appropriate words or symbols in this step, to express their idea as clearly as possible, bearing in mind the most relevant mediums and channels of communicating (National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management, n.d.: 6).

Transmitting the message: This step involves (Guffey and Loewy, 2018: 2) the transmitting the message with the use of appropriate mediums of communication. This can take place face-to-face or virtually, through technology. While conveying the message, the sender must send the message at the most relevant time, ensuring that there are minimal or no barriers to this communication. Ensuring that the communication channel is free from obstacles or interference increases the chances of the message reaching the target audience and holding its attention, thus resulting in effective communication (National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management, n.d.: 7).

Reception of the message: In this step, the receiver, whom the message was intended to reach, receives the message. Under circumstances where the message is communicated orally, the receiver must be a great listener to avoid loss of information during transmission of the message (National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management, n.d.: 7). Upon receiving the message (Guffey and Loewy, 2018: 3), the following steps are: **Decoding the message:** The message is received and understood by the receiver. The receiver has to understand the message as intended by the sender. The communicator of a message can make the receiver listen, but understanding has to be achieved by the receiver alone. This aspect of understanding refers to “getting through” to a person accepting or rejecting **the message:** The receiver may accept or reject the decoded message. The acceptance of a message is the decision of the receiver and it is impacted by the accuracy of the message, the authority of the sender and the implications of accepting the information.

Using the information: This step is where the receiver uses the information. The receiver may use the information, discard it, or store it for the future (Guffey and Loewy, 2018: 2).

Giving feedback: Feedback occurs when the receiver sends back a response to the sender or acknowledges receiving the message. The communication loop is complete only after receiving feedback. Therefore, feedback is essential for determining whether the message has been appropriately received, decoded, accepted, and used by the receiver (National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management, n.d.: 7). An understanding of

communication, in general, has been provided and thus, the focus is now on crisis communication specifically.

2.7 CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Below is a model that illustrates how the communication process functions.

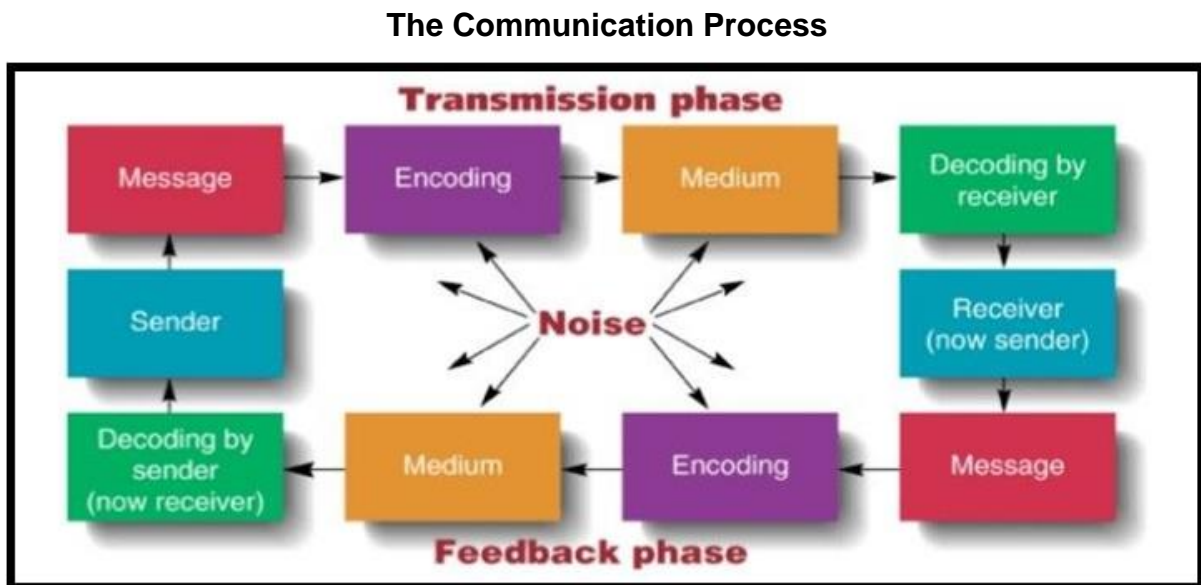


Figure 2.7 The Communication Process (Fielding and du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014: 14)

Figure 2.7 shows that communication is an ongoing process as each step has an arrow leading to the next step, and the last step also has an arrow leading back to the first step. The sender sends a message to the receiver using a medium. It is called encoding. It is the transmission phase. The receiver decodes the message, ascribing their understanding and then provides feedback on the received message. The original receiver then becomes the sender as they now send a message back to the original sender using a medium (Indeed, 2021: 1).

The original sender, upon receiving feedback, now becomes the recipient of the message (feedback). It is the feedback phase. Thus, the sender and receiver swap roles to reach mutual understanding. During the process of communication, there is noise. Noise (Nordquist, 2019: 1) is any interference between the sender and receiver during the communication process. The noise can be internal or external and reduces the chances of successful communication. The existence of noise emphasizes the importance of constant feedback as feedback indicates to what extent the intended messages were understood.

According to Figure 2.7, organisations should ensure ongoing communication between themselves and their stakeholders amid a crisis. According to Holtom, Edmondson and Niu (2020: 1) this means the organisation must use various communication mediums to reach their stakeholders, decode the message and react using feedback. However, barriers in this process may exist; thus, stakeholders must ask questions to clarify and better understand the situation. In addition, organisations need to constantly address any concerns and questions that the stakeholders may have. Organisations thus need always to monitor the various channels of communication to address concerns efficiently.

Juneja (2019: 1) calls crisis communication a “special wing” that aims to protect the organisation's reputation by maintaining a positive image in the public's eyes. Because brand identity is amongst the most valuable assets in the organisation, the primary purpose of the crisis communication team is to protect the brand identity and maintain the firm standing of the organisation in the industry. Zamoun and Gorpe (2018, 205) add that crisis communication should address internal and external organisational publics affected by the crisis. The provided information must be consistent by designating one primary spokesperson and the crisis management team. Crisis communication links to issues management, risk communication and reputation management. Crisis communication is a specific part of reputation management, as a crisis is likely to jeopardise an organisation's reputation.

Crisis communication is the lifeblood of the entire crisis management effort and plays a vital role at every stage of crisis management. Lando (2014: 6) cites Banks (2007: 1), who emphasises that the value of crisis communication lies in providing information about the crisis to all stakeholders and shows the organisation's preparedness to handle it and elaborate on the crisis resolution. Banks (2007: 1) concludes that organisations should communicate with stakeholders in crises and before and after the negative occurrence, with strategies designed to reduce damage to the organisation's image. Irimes (2014: 97) agrees that crisis communication is an integral part of the crisis management process, asserting that it consists of strategically managing: the organisational message sent to stakeholders, the time and channels required to effectively communicate with the media, employees, customers, and decision-makers. According to him, communication during a crisis must focus on defusing it, utilising efficient and rapid communication methods.

The University of Oxford (2016: 1) adds that crisis communication is crucial for crisis management, ensuring continuous operational effectiveness during and after a significant incident. Crisis communication further provides guidance and reassurance to affected stakeholders, thus safeguarding the organisation's reputation. Canny (2016: 2) then recommends that organisations view a crisis from a balanced perspective, meaning that as much it can be a threat, it can also be an opportunity for the organisation. Using this perspective will increase the probability of recovering from the crisis. It is an essential viewpoint because although the public can betray the organisation and damage its reputation, it can also bolster and help the organisation illuminate the crisis. Therefore, crisis communication should foster public support or favourably influence perceptions about it to the organisation. Ashari, Abang Ahmed, and Samani (2017: 2) further state that responsibility requires accountability and, therefore, organisations must answer for their actions. Therefore, when a crisis occurs, it is of utmost importance for an organisation to immediately respond to its stakeholders, where crisis responsibility connects with the crisis response strategies.

Van Rensburg, Conradie and Dondolo (2017: 65) add that in the quest to save or repair the organisational reputation, organisational crisis communication content should involve three sequential categories. They are: first, **instructing information** where affected publics know how to react to the crisis physically. It is vital as people should be the priority. After that, the **adjusting information** should follow. Here, the organisation disseminate information that assists people in coping psychologically with the magnitude of the crisis. The organisation express sympathy here. They also provide counselling and other corrective actions. Lastly, organisations should send out **internalising information**. The public uses this type of information to formulate an image of the organisation.

Bakker, Kerstholt and Giebels (2018: 2) further stress that effective communication to elicit appropriate actions before and during a crisis should not be sender-focused but rather receiver-focused. For an organisation to adjust information according to the needs of the stakeholders, it must understand how citizens interpret and respond to such messages. They must also know how it relates to citizen behaviour during a crisis. Page Center Training (2019a: 1) adds that crisis communication is a dialogue between the organisation and its stakeholders, and it occurs before, during and after the negative occurrence (crisis).

This dialogue provides information regarding strategies and tactics designed to minimise damage to the organisational image.

The main objectives of crisis communication, according to Page Center Training (2019b: 1), should be:

- Providing precise, timely information to all targeted internal and external stakeholders;
- Showing concern for the safety of lives;
- Safeguarding organisational facilities and assets; and
- Maintaining a favourable organisational image as an excellent corporate or community citizen.

Because of threat, surprise, short response time and uncertainty, decision making and communication activities after a crisis could be affected. Therefore, to manage it effectively, organisations should not respond with routine solutions. However, Page Center Training (2019c: 1) advises that, as an initial crisis response, organisations should follow these best practices:

- To be quick, organisations should provide an initial response within an hour of the crisis occurring;
- Carefully check all facts to provide accurate information;
- Maintain consistency by ensuring that the spokespeople are informed about the crisis and critical message points;
- Prioritise public safety;
- Maximise on using all the available communication channels, which includes the internet, intranet and mass notification systems;
- Show concern and sympathy for victims;
- Do not forget to include employees in the initial response ; and
- Be prepared to provide stress and trauma counselling to the crisis victims and their families. Employees should also receive this service.

Juneja (2019: 1) agrees by maintaining that the crisis communication processes ought to follow the following steps:

- Employees must be urged not to ignore any external stakeholders (including media) but rather discuss the issue with them as there is nothing to be ashamed of. Avoiding questions only makes the situation worse;
- Organisations must avoid playing the blame game and instead show care and empathy towards crisis victims;
- Effective communication should be encouraged in the organisation during emergencies. It should be easy for employees to have access to management to discuss critical situations and reach mutually acceptable solutions;
- Management must disseminate accurate information across all departments;
- Crisis communication specialists need to be decisive and act fast on their decisions;
- Confidential information must remain private as sharing it is unethical and unprofessional; and
- Management needs to continuously evaluate employee performance, which can also include surprise audits.

2.7.1 Crisis Communication Stages

Indeed (2022: 1) and Rouse (2018: 1) identify five phases of a typical crisis, during which an organisation must communicate with its stakeholders, and communication must evolve with each stage. The **pre-crisis phase** comprises planning and education. At this phase, the organisation must monitor emerging risks, anticipate possible crises, educate relevant parties about the potential risks, and suggest actions. The crisis communication team, which will communicate with stakeholders during the crisis, must also be identified. The **initial phase** starts when the crisis has begun, and the organisation starts communicating with stakeholders. This period may be confusing and intense, and not much information can be available yet. Nonetheless, the CMT should provide clear and accurate direction, give more details, and calm people's fears where necessary. Even when there is not much information available yet, crisis communication is still vital, and it must reassure people that the organisation is working on a solution.

The third phase is the **maintenance phase**, where the organisation provides updates on the crisis and details any continuing risks (Chadha, 2020: 1). At this stage, the organisation collects feedback from anyone affected by the crisis, rectifies any misinformation, and assesses the situation and how it responds. After that, at the **resolution phase**, it has effectively ended. Nevertheless, recovery remains, and communication carries on. This

communication includes information regarding recovering and rebuilding and more comprehensive information on how the crisis occurred. At this stage, it is best also to remind people how to be prepared. Lastly, during the **evaluation phase**, reciprocal communication is of utmost importance. The organisation must evaluate and assess how its response went and the potential for improvement. A review of the crisis communication plan also occurs, and management makes necessary updates or improvements accordingly. Finally, management presents an after-action report to comprehensively document the crisis and response (Rouse, 2018: 1).

Page Center Training (2019a: 1) then narrows the stages down to three at which crisis communication should occur: pre-crisis, during the crisis, and **post-crisis**. At all these stages, organisations have ethical responsibilities toward their stakeholders. Before it happens, organisations must monitor potential crisis risks, decide on the management of the potential crises, and train relevant employees involved in the crisis management process. During the crisis, management must collect information to assist the crisis management team in decision-making; then, messages must be created and disseminated to the organisation's stakeholders. Lastly, after the crisis has occurred, the efforts to manage it need to be assessed and follow-up crisis messages as required. Finally, the organisation needs to release updates on the recovery process, corrective actions, and any investigations of the crisis. The stages of crisis communication are in Figure 2.8 below.

Stages of Crisis Communication



Figure 2.8 Stages of Crisis Communication (Page Center Training, 2019a: 1)

The above Figure 2.8 shows the three summarised stages of crisis communication in sequence. The first stage at which crisis communication occurs is before the crisis occurs (pre-crisis stage). First, organisations monitor potential risks that could result in crises. Scanning traditional media is vital to identify current and future trends in the organisation's environment. After that, management must provide solutions to tackle the potential, and employees who will form the crisis management team need training on effective crisis communication. The second stage is where a risk materialises into a crisis, meaning that prevention was not possible. At this stage, critical information needed by the crisis team must be collected and processed to inform decision-making. Finally, crises messages are created and sent to various stakeholders using relevant communication tools. Once the crisis has occurred, the post-crisis stage begins, where an assessment of the crisis management processes must occur. Follow-up crisis messages need to be sent to all stakeholders to assure them that the crisis is over and the organisation has taken remedial actions.

2.7.2 The Role of Mass Media in Crisis Communication

Approximately twenty-eight percent (28%) of crises on social media spread worldwide within just one hour, yet it takes most organisations almost 21 hours to issue a response. According to Muck Rack (2018: 1), a public relations software platform, traditional media platforms were the only forms of conveying organisational messages to the public in the past. However, today's digital landscape brings a variety of new platforms to reach mass audiences. Murdock (2010) in Austin and Jin (2017: 165) argues that the public with high involvement in crises is highly likely to utilise active media channels such as newspapers and magazines when retrieving and processing news and crisis information. Austin and Jin (2017: 166) conclude that social media can enable sharing of information, sharing of opinions, and expressing of emotions regarding crises in ways that spread far beyond those of traditional public relations communication tactics, such as press releases or public statements.

Leka and Kosumi (2017: 44) further clarify that the main aim of media is to form a public opinion by informing the general public about the news that is of interest to them as they occur. This information aids the public to form an opinion about specific events, facts, phenomena and processes of interest to society. Keller (2016: 629) defines the public as any group of people who have an actual or potential interest in or impact on an organisation's image or individual products, adding that organisations not only need to

relate constructively to their customers, suppliers, and dealers but it but also relate to a large number of interested publics. According to Leka and Kosumi (2017: 44), public opinion is the voice of the people- a thought or belief held by many people. After that, a consensus of some sort amongst the opinions must prevail, and lastly, direct or indirect influence must exert from the agreement.

Pethe (2018: 66) stresses that every citizen has the right to express their views regarding any issue, and organisational seldom take crucial decisions without considering public opinion. Thus, public opinion affects reputation. Therefore, the main elements of public opinion are that an issue or crisis needs to exist, which then mobilises many individuals to express themselves on the phenomenon. Public opinion, therefore, plays a central role in shaping an organisation's image.

After discussing the role in crisis communication, differentiations will be made between traditional mass media and new mass media.

2.7.2.1 Traditional Mass Media

The average person still listens to at least 112 minutes of radio and watches almost five hours of television daily (Alpine, 2017: 1). Over fifty percent of all newspapers are still print only, and although many now have digital versions, some of the content requires the audiences to be subscribers. It is also important to note that of the people using traditional media, over two-thirds trust the information they receive from newspapers, radio or TV (Alpine, 2017: 1). Traditional media refers to communication methods that focus on delivering news to the public in general or a targeted group. It includes print publications such as newspapers and magazines, broadcast news like television and radio, and recently these media outlets have introduced digital versions like online newspapers and magazines (Muck Rack, 2018: 1). The different forms of traditional media are discussed below.

2.7.2.1.1 Radio

The radio uses sound communication by radio waves, usually transmitting music, news, and other programs from single broadcast stations to multitudes of individual listeners equipped with radio receivers. From its birth early in the 20th century, broadcast radio astonished and delighted the public by providing news and entertainment with an immediacy never before thought possible. From about 1920 to 1945, radio developed into the first electronic mass medium, monopolizing "the airwaves" and defining an entire

generation of mass culture along with newspapers, magazines, and motion pictures. Based on the human voice, radio is a uniquely personal medium, invoking a listener's imagination to fill in mental images around the broadcast sounds. More readily and in a more widespread fashion than any other medium, radio can soothe listeners with comforting dialogue or background music, or it can jar them back into reality with polemics and breaking news. Radio also can employ an endless plethora of sound and music effects to entertain and enthrall listeners (Sterling, 2020: 1).

2.7.2.1.2 Television (TV)

TV uses the electronic delivery of moving images and sound from a source to a receiver. By extending the senses of vision and hearing beyond the limits of physical distance, television has had a considerable influence on society. Conceived in the early 20th century as a possible medium for education and interpersonal communication, it became by mid-century a vibrant broadcast medium, using the model of broadcast radio to bring news and entertainment to people all over the world (Sterling, 2020: 1).

2.7.2.1.3 Newspapers

In general, the purpose of a newspaper is to convey, as efficiently as possible, current information, or "news", to a particular audience. What constitutes "news" depends in part on the intended audience. Newspapers aimed at a general audience will carry news about politics, crime, wars, economics--just about anything that could interest a general reader. On the other hand, a farm newspaper might carry news about farming techniques developments, information about farm-related legislation progress through Congress, crop prices, county and state fairs, and so forth (Illinois Library, 2021: 1).

2.7.2.1.4 Magazines

A magazine or periodical will, in general, be written in a more elevated prose style and will usually offer more in-depth coverage of news, if it carries information at all. In contrast, if a newspaper attempts to inform, a magazine attempts to enlighten and entertain (Illinois Library, 2021: 1).

Magazines usually have covers, often bearing an illustration or photograph. A newspaper, in contrast, typically do not have a cover but a nameplate running across the top of its front page, the rest of the page filled with news stories. In addition, magazines are more likely than newspapers to have detailed tables of contents. In contrast, newspapers, if they

include any table of contents at all, will identify the principal sections (such as national news, local news, sports, society news, classifieds, business news, and so on.). Newspapers and magazines are print publications issued at regular intervals over time. Historically, newspapers were usually published daily or weekly, but sometimes semi-weekly (twice a week), bi-weekly (every two weeks), or monthly. Magazines, in contrast, were usually issued weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or quarterly (four times a year). Both newspapers and magazines could be purchased by subscription (an arrangement whereby the reader pays in advance for a year of issues) or individually, often at newsstands, grocery stores, bookstores, train stations, and other places (Illinois Library, 2021: 1).

As technology develops, so does media and hence the birth of new mass media.

2.7.2.2 New Mass Media (Social Media)

Valentini, Romenti and Kruckeberg (2018: 58) stress a growing consensus that new or social media are changing crisis dynamics by speeding up the development of critical situations and, consequently, potentially forming new types of crises. It is attributed to social media enabling the rapid sharing of information on an enormously unimaginable scale in real-time. People use social media to seek updated information regarding critical situations, share experiences, and get emotional support. Consequently, in a crisis, public to public discussions play a significant role in shaping awareness on various social media networks, mobilising action and thus enhancing the escalation.

Social media conversations can also trigger crises as rumours spread rapidly, threatening the organisational reputation. Moreover, social media conversations challenge the organisations' responses to severe matters. They are not restricted to a specific social network but can and usually move from one social network to another and even spread to offline arenas. Accordingly, it has become more difficult for mainstream media to disregard content originating from social media. Therefore, organisations should frequently monitor social media to foresee and engage in possible critical online discourses (Valentini, Romenti and Kruckeberg, 2018: 58).

Digital Dynamite (2019: 1) states that 2019 brought impressive growth across the digital landscape as South Africa's annual digital growth and penetration rise impressively. From a population of 57.73 million people, 31.8 million use the internet regularly, and more than

23 million (40 per cent) people engage actively on social media platforms. *Facebook* recorded 23 million users, *LinkedIn* had the highest number of users with 6.9 million users. *Instagram* had 4 million users, *Twitter* was fourth with 1.67 million users, and *Snapchat* with 1.35 million users.

Russell and Taylor (2014: 18), per Stephens and Malone (2016: 380), say it is of utmost importance to note the increasing significant effect the internet has on organisational communication as the speed and ease at which communication can now take place through the internet are changing expectations. For example, stakeholders expect more almost immediate information about events. It includes crisis communication. It is imperative since time is of the essence when it comes to crisis communication as organisations should give their side of the story within an hour of a crisis occurring. Stephens and Malone (2016: 381) say organisations are no longer just subjected to communicating with stakeholders using press releases, television, radio and other traditional media, but they can also now consider online resources.

Furthermore, organisational websites help keep various stakeholders immediately updated during a crisis. Social media has also become a dominant tool for disseminating information- YouTube, blogs, Facebook and Twitter are some of the social networks with the most users. One key component of such new media is facilitating bi-directional communication at a relatively low cost. Not only do stakeholders get to communicate with the organisation, but they can also meet and interact with other stakeholders virtually, therefore also bypassing gatekeeping that exists in traditional media (Stephens and Malone, 2016: 381).

Therefore, it is undeniable that social media plays an integral part in our lives. Millions of people use it to source breaking news, discuss social issues, and share personal opinions. Social media also allows consumers to interact with organisations more directly and effectively (Lin, Huang, Zhang and Chen, 2018: 12). Keeping close contact with customers is essential for organisations to ensure that their competence does not become obsolete. Core organisational competencies that do not evolve and align with the customers' needs are highly likely to become core rigidities. Hence, they should be nurtured, enhanced and developed over time (Russell and Taylor, 2014: 16-17). Therefore, the current social media environment (Austin and Jin, 2017: 166) poses professional strategic communicators with unprecedented challenges when managing crisis communication and organisational reputation.

It is imperative to now note the key differences between traditional media and new media. Below is a summary of the differences.

2.7.2.3 The Difference Between Traditional Media and New Media

Social media can reach a maximum number of audiences, whereas traditional media generally has a more targeted audience. Social media also has versatility as one can edit content even after posting it, unlike traditional media, which is difficult to alter after publication. Information is posted and received immediately on social media, but traditional media has press or publication days and times. Moreover, social media allows for reciprocal communication, and traditional press provides one-way or linear communication. Lastly, social media usually has unreliable demographic data, while traditional media is more accurate (Bailey, 2016: 1). Austin and Jin (2017: 165) outline that, unlike traditional media, social media does not adhere to constrained schedules, which allows for the public to be able to access information wherever and whenever they require it. Based on it, this also stimulates or triggers specific behavioural responses.

Traditional and new media have to form the organisation's communication channels, reflected in its Crisis Management Plan. The crisis management team thus has to be well-trained in effectively utilising traditional and new media to communicate with stakeholders.

2.8 CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM

Fontanella (2019: 1) stresses that since some crises are unavoidable, organisations must have a range of tailored responses ready to handle conflicts. Having a crisis management team is a great way to prepare for a variety of crises proactively. These teams are in charge of anticipating potential problems the organisation could face and making important decisions to resolve strenuous situations. Successful crisis management teams understand the various types of business crises and are thoroughly prepared for all situations.

In addition, (Juneja, 2019: 1), the appointment of a team leader who is fit enough to take charge of the situation immediately needs to take place. Firstly, this lead needs to understand the crucial areas of concern in an emergency and encourage employees to work in harmony. Secondly, the crisis management team should know where things went wrong and improve the present practices for improved and smooth future organisational performance. Crises should be ranked against to their potential effect on the organisation

and external stakeholders as this will assist in deciding which crises need resolution immediately and which ones can be given attention at a later stage.

The crisis management team thus primarily focuses on (Juneja, 2019: 1):

- Detection of crisis early warning signs;
- Identification of problem areas;
- Meeting with employees face to face to discuss identified areas of concern;
- Preparing a crisis management plan which will work best during the emergency; and
- Motivating the employees not to lose hope and helping the organisation conquer the challenging situation and prepare for the future.

Therefore, the team must constantly communicate with external stakeholders and the media (Juneja, 2019: 1). Whether The Crisis Management Team is big or small, it should consist of personnel from the following disciplines: A Leader; General Administrative Support; Finance and Administration; Human Resources; Information Technology; Legal Representation; Operations and Business Recovery; Project Management; Risk, Security and Compliance; Facility Support; and Marketing and Corporate Communications (Long, 2019: 1).

Even if one person plays multiple roles, the above-listed form the essential functions to ensure the team's effectiveness. Kinsey (2019: 1) points out that different crises may require vastly different crisis management plans and response teams. A technological crisis, for example, may necessitate a strong technology team. A financial crisis requires accountants and other financial experts. A crisis of organisational misdeeds requires a strong human resource department.

Conversely (Kinsey, 2019: 1), crises of malevolence and natural disasters call for all the above expertise. Nonetheless, in every case, it is always advantageous to have an excellent public relations spokesperson. Moreover, organisations may hire contracted crisis management public relations specialists who are well-trained and experienced and offer an outside perspective when a major crisis occurs. Thus, crisis leadership skills include effective communication, accountability, sound decision-making, positivity, and good emotional management.

Having discussed crisis management, the team and their roles, the recall of vehicles in South Africa and globally will now be put into context as both a local and global crisis. Literature deems this to be a major crisis experienced by car manufacturing companies.

2.9 CONTEXTUALISING A MAJOR CRISIS EXPERIENCED BY CAR MANUFACTURING COMPANIES: VEHICLE RECALLS

It is no secret that recalls make front-page news, especially when they involve vehicles catching fire, reports Car Mag (2017: 1). Recalls are widespread as modern automobiles consist of thousands of sensors, components, and systems that occasionally go wrong as they are outsourced from suppliers, making quality control a significant challenge. However, it is no excuse as the manufacturer is still responsible for all aspects of the car. Organisations announce recall when a latent defect can result in a safety risk. This defect is usually in a group of vehicles sharing the flaw, requiring urgent attention. These recalls serve as a focus for this study as they are a significant crisis that threatened organisational reputations for the companies in which they occurred.

2.9.1 The Automotive Industry in South Africa

As stated by Russell and Taylor (2014: 8), two of three companies operate globally through international markets, operations, financing, and supply chains. Globalisation manifests in the form of selling in foreign markets, an organisation that purchases from foreign suppliers, producing in foreign lands or forming partnerships with foreign businesses. The benefits for global organisations include taking advantage of favourable costs, gaining access to international markets, being more responsive to changes in demand, building sources of supply, and keeping abreast of the trends and technologies. In addition, globalisation decreases trade barriers and the advancing of the internet. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) unbolted the heavily protected telecommunications, textiles, and agriculture trades. It further extended the scope of global trade rules to include goods and services. Although a global product and services mean acquiring more customers, it also translates to more intense competition. Thus, organisational competitiveness is required not only against other companies but against other countries as well. It is imperative that how effectively a country competes in the global marketplace affects its economic success and the quality of life for its citizens.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (n.d.) cited in Russel and Taylor (2014: 13), competitiveness refers to “the degree to which a nation can produce goods and services that meet the test of international markets while simultaneously maintaining or expanding the real incomes of its citizens”. Productivity is the prevailing measure of competitiveness where increased productivity allows for wage growth without producing inflation, therefore raising the standard of living for citizens. Productivity growth also represents how rapidly an economy can expand its capacity to supply goods and services. However, organisations must not compromise the quality of these products and services (Russell and Taylor, 2014: 12). In agreement, Hazier, Render and Munson (2017: 71-72) identify six reasons behind domestic organisations wanting to go global. Firstly, organisations want to improve their supply chain by locating facilities in countries with unique resources like raw materials, low-cost labour, and human resource expertise.

Secondly (Munson, 2017: 71), organisations aim to reduce the risks associated with fluctuating exchange rates and make the most of the tangible opportunities to reduce their direct costs. For example, less stringent government regulations on several operations practices (such as health and safety and environmental control) can reduce indirect costs. In addition, because they have facilities in countries with different currencies allows organisations to finesse currency risk (and costs associated with it) as per the demands of the economic conditions. Thirdly, organisations learn from an improved understanding of management innovations in different countries, enhancing their operations. Operating internationally also reduces response time to meet customers’ altering product and service requirements. Fourthly (Munson, 2017: 72), organisations understand markets and find opportunities for new products and services as they interact with foreign stakeholders. Entering foreign markets can expand the life cycle of a product. Fifthly, organisations can improve their products by being open to the free flow of ideas. Sixthly, organisations can attract and retain global talent.

The automotive industry is frequently labelled one of the most global of all industries. South Africa is Africa’s most prominent vehicle producer, producing seventy-five per cent (75%) of the continents’ total vehicles (Moyo, 2015: 124). However, multinational corporations based in Germany, Europe, Japan, and the United States of America dominate the South African automotive industry. Being original equipment manufacturers for Ford, BMW, Volkswagen, Daimler-Chrysler, and Toyota and importing and exporting to those very

markets, technical failures and financial declines experienced globally affect South Africa. The South African automotive sector comprises the manufacturing, distribution, servicing and maintenance of motor vehicles. As such, the industry accounts for roughly ten per cent (10%) of the country's manufacturing exports, making it a strategic sector for the government's economy.

The industry is a high employer mainly located in Eastern Cape and Gauteng, coastal areas where low production costs are an advantage (Moyo, 2015: 125). The South African Automotive Industry's major vehicle manufacturers, updated by Jordaan, Jeffrey, Fieldgate and Rolland (2018: 2), are BMW, Ford, Mercedes-Benz, Nissan, Toyota and Volkswagen. In addition, there are five hundred (500) automotive component suppliers. In 2017 a total of 587 000 vehicles were produced. Fifty-eight per cent (58%) exported, and forty-two per cent (42%) of the cars sold locally.

2.9.2 What Warrants a Recall

In South Africa, before selling a vehicle range, it must pass the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (NRCS) homologation process, including critical safety considerations. If a manufacturer becomes aware of an unidentified latent issue, the manufacturer can issue a recall. The National Consumer Commission (NCC), which implements the Consumer Protection Act, can notify the manufacturer. The notice could state that the manufacturer needs to carry out a compulsory recall if the NCC believes any goods or the car itself are unsafe or pose a potential risk to the public (Car Mag, 2017: 1).

As per the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (n.d.), new models, in alignment with international practises, new car models, built-up cars, car modifications, whether manufactured locally or imported, must conform to the homologation process. This process aims at ensuring the safety of consumers by identifying possible risks early. The vehicle's original manufacturer needs to supply a sample for evaluation, supported by detailed documents regarding inspection and test reports compiled by professionally recognised laboratories or inspecting authorities. Hippo (2018: 1) thus adds that when organisations announce recalls, they ought to include information such as a description of the defect, the possible dangers of continuing to drive the vehicle, warning signs that owners should look out for and the steps that the manufacturer will take to fix the problem.

DataRPM (n.d.) reports that in 2013 number of vehicles recalled exceeded those sold globally. By the end of May in 2014, over 20 million cars were recalled in America, 13.8 million of which belonged to General Motors. Hippo (2018: 1) and Polity (2018: 1) clarify that over 50 million vehicles are recalled annually due to safety-related defects. It includes South Africa. They cite Car Mag (n.d.), who attributes vehicle recalls to the following defects:

- Steering problems or failures which may result in loss of vehicle control;
- Issues with fuel-system components which could lead to fuel leakage and consequently the car burning;
- Accelerator controls breaking or becoming stuck; Cracking or breaking of wheels, leading to loss of vehicle control; Windshield wipers not working correctly;
- Seats were unexpectedly failing during regular use; Wire system issues that can cause fire or loss of lighting; and
- Airbags that randomly deploy or inflict severe injury when they activate.

Now that the researcher has explained vehicle recalls and their attributes, it is essential to document what qualifies as quality to vehicle consumers. Again, this is a crucial part of risk management to avoid crises of malfunction.

2.9.3 Dimensions of Quality for Manufactured Products

Consumers weigh quality characteristics concerning the cost of the product. Generally speaking, if customers feel they are receiving what they paid for or even more, they tend to be satisfied with the quality of the product (Budd, 2018: 1).

Furthermore, customers are aware that certain companies produce better-quality products compared to others and buy accordingly. Quality, however, is subjective, which necessitates organisations to consider how their consumers define quality. Russell and Taylor (2014: 31) thus state that the dimensions for manufactured automobiles that consumers look for include the following: **Performance** which is the essential functioning characteristic of a product, such as how well a car handles or its petrol mileage cover; **Features** or “extra” items added to the basic features of a product, such as leather interior and heated seats in a car, are called features; **Reliability** which speaks to a product’s probability to operate appropriately within the expected timeframe being more or less

accurate. For example, if a car only requires servicing once a year (as per the manual), it is deemed reliable.

Furthermore, **Conformance** is the degree to which a product meets pre-established standards. **Durability** is a product's life span before it needs replacement. Serviceability is the ease of getting a product repaired. It is also the speed and the courtesy, and competence of the person doing the repairs. Serviceability refers to effectiveness; **Aesthetics** is the feel, look, sound, smell, or taste of a product is its aesthetics; **Safety** is the assurance that customers will not suffer from injury or harm from a product. It is an imperative consideration for automobiles; and **other subjective perceptions based on the brand name, advertising, media coverage, etc.** These are public opinions (Russell and Taylor, 2014: 31).

According to automotive guru, *Tatarevic's analysis*, every manufacturer wants consumers to believe that their cars are durable but profitable (Budd, 2018: 1). It is why they continuously improve and update their vehicles for customers to keep returning. Consequently, setting a solid limit for how long a car should last would be detrimental for any brand. However, the commonly accepted lifespan for cars has doubled since the 60s and 70s to 200 000 miles (321 800 kilometres). Citing Lynman (2018: 1), a chief analyst at True Car, Budd (2018: 1), correspondingly declares that the average lifespan of a typical passenger car is more or less twelve years, which is a slow but steady increase compared to previous decades. Alternatively, when citing White (2018: 1), an executive director at Car Care Council, a car should last approximately 200 000 miles (321 800 kilometres). Therefore, motorists must follow their manufacturer's maintenance schedule for their vehicles to last a long time.

However, it is generally easier to reach high mileage totals with today's vehicles as they become smarter, better designed, and better built than thirty years ago (Budd, 2018: 1). The existence of automated factories has resulted in high-precision manufacturing, and car parts are more reliable. Mechanical systems were replaced with electric systems, which reduced breakdowns and improved the efficiency of engines. Instead of changing the oil after every 3000 miles (4 827 kilometres), better oils have increased the intervals to as high as 15 000 miles (24 135 kilometres). Furthermore, new coolants can last for the entire lifespan of a car. As a result, standard vehicles can last up to 200 000 miles (321 800

kilometres) whilst electric vehicles can last up to 300 000 miles (507 000 kilometres). As the durability of cars increases, so do the manufacturer warranties (Budd, 2018: 1).

2.9.4 Case Studies of Personalised Quality Promised by Each Company

Companies ought to know what their target markets want in their products to be responsive to their needs. Below, the researcher discusses company A, B, C and D's quality promises to their consumers. These quality assurance statements are on the companies' websites and other communication dissemination tools.

Company A

MINI South Africa (2019: 1) points out their cars are safe to the core, from technology-intelligent headlights and airbags to tyres that continue running even when flat. Rigorous testing ensures the protection of passengers and pedestrians by the most sophisticated safety features, such as active and passive systems working in synch. The elective Driving Assistant system warns the driver about a pedestrian nearby or possible collusion, amongst other features. A built-in camera on the windscreen pinpoints precarious situations and prepares the braking system to reduce reaction time. Another optional feature of MINI is an emergency call system. The vehicle sends an automatic distress call to the BMW Group Call Centre with the driver's position, travel direction, and the number of activated airbags. Help then arrives rapidly. In addition, MINI vehicles have anti-locking braking, which allows sudden stopping on slippery roads. Cornering Brake Control provides for improved stability when turning at high speed. MINI also offers three driving modes to allow for as much or as little control that the driver wants. The structure of the cars is rigid, yet collapsible which is essential for absorbing impact.

Mini Select Finance offers drivers a new car every three years, provided that they do not drive more than 95 000 kilometres for the duration of the contract. In addition, owners can extend their Motorplan for up to seven years or 200 000 kilometres (MINI South Africa, 2019: 1).

Company B

On the other hand, BMW's service software suggests that its cars should not be on the road for that long. BMW owners and technicians have found that as soon as post-2002

models get to 300 000 kilometres (186 411 miles), the in-built Condition Based Service (CBS) no longer notifies them of their next service, and oil change intervals become shorter. Today, over half of BMWs are leased instead of being bought, as BMW offers customers the option of hiring a new car every three years (Tatarevic, 2016: 1). Nevertheless, BMW South Africa (2019: 1) maintains that their vehicles offer infinite driving pleasure, whether new or second-hand, as their pre-owned cars undergo extensive visual and technical assessments by their specialists to obtain approval.

Thus, BMW guarantees 100 percent first-class quality and uncompromising reliability when it comes to their cars. BMW pre-owned cars are promised to less than four years old with a maximum of 75 000 kilometres and come with a twelve month or 25 000 kilometres Motorplan. New BMWs have a five year or 100 000 kilometres Motorplan and customers have the option of extending it to a maximum of seven years or 200 000 kilometres. As far as safety is concerned, BMW offers standard and optional safety features which reduce the risk of collision and prevent injuries if the worst occurs. Furthermore, BMW Assist is a safety system that sets BMW apart from its competition. It uses advanced technology to locate its client to send a response specialist to assist its clients (BMW South Africa, 2019: 1).

Company C

Likewise, Pines Ford (2017: 1) boasts that Ford cars now last longer than ever before with an average of fifteen years or more than 200 000 miles (321 800 kilometres), adding that the vehicle can last you even longer if you follow maintenance and repair schedules correctly. Primarily, there are three reasons behind the increase in Ford car durability. Firstly, Ford now uses advanced materials as modern engines and manufacture components using high-tech. For example, some models have a propriety, diamond-like carbon finish on their machines, preventing engine wear even when operating intensely. These enhanced materials are the reason for the high performance and longevity of numerous essential components in the Ford vehicles, such as the engine block and the powertrain in their entirety.

Secondly, Ford vehicles now have sophisticated anti-corrosion coatings and consequently offers an industry-leading corrosion warranty. In the past innovative technology to prevent corrosion did not exist, and as a result, many cars would fail as rust and corrosion ate away at their engine blocks. Thirdly, Ford uses high-tech engineering. The advancement

of science and technology means today's Ford vehicles are high performing, have economical fuel consumption and have a long, durable life span (Pines Ford, 2017: 1).

Company D

Mercedes-Benz South Africa (2019: 4-13) in their Warranty and Maintenance Plan guarantee "sheer quality, reliability, safety and comfort" when it comes to their cars. Consumers need to ensure that their vehicles are regularly maintained and serviced according to the recommended manufacturer specifications to enjoy thousands of carefree kilometres. Mercedes-Benz South Africa aims to keep its consumers safe through a network of ultra-modern dealerships which have all the repair and service facilities needed throughout their cars' lifespan. Genuine original replacement parts are used and guaranteed for two years. Prioritising customer satisfaction, Mercedes-Benz South Africa stresses that their dealerships will perform all repair work until the client is delighted. Furthermore, management will contact clients regularly to take part in a Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) which enables the organisation to continue improving their services for the added benefit of the clients.

Mercedes-Benz' Premium Drive Plan covers servicing and maintenance of their cars for five years or 100 000 kilometres (whichever occurs first). The benefits of this plan also include a manufacturer's warranty for two years regardless of the kilometres travelled, roadside assistance, and touring guarantee and sign and drive for the duration of the plan. Breakdown assistance includes the customer's travel costs to and from the dealership covered by the company. Companies also transport customers at no cost to nearby locations and pay for their accommodation up to R800 a night per person if the breakdown occurs beyond a radius of 100 kilometres from the vehicle's licensing authority. A courtesy car is only provided in an instance where the car is at a dealership for more than forty-eight hours (Mercedes-Benz South Africa, 2019: 4).

In addition, approximately a month before the next service is due, the ASSYST Active Service System begins a countdown to point out the next service and the type of service needed. This system constantly monitors the oil level, oil temperatures, coolant and ambient, the speed and load of the engine, and road speed. Feedback from monitoring these elements provides appropriate service intervals (Mercedes-Benz South Africa, 2019: 20). Mercedes-Benz also offers clients the option of getting a new car every three years instead of buying one.

2.10 AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE CRISES THAT OCCURRED IN THE SELECTED CAR MANUFACTURING COMPANIES

South Africa has seen quite a significant number of car recalls by manufacturers in recent years, particularly for modern models manufactured between 2007 and 2017, due to technical glitches that could result in the vehicles catching fire.

2.10.1 Company A

The Witness (2012: 1) and Mail and Guardian (2012: 1) reported that 3 350 Company A customers will be affected by a worldwide technical recall of its 2006 to 2010 models in January of that year. It is due to the additional water pipe being at risk of failing to function under high operating temperatures, leading to the circuit board overheating. The organisation promised to notify affected clients and replace the water pump for free, which roughly takes an hour to do. The company told Algoa FM (2012: 1) that owners need not panic as the company had not received any injury reports regarding the matter. However, they recommended that owners take preventive measures by taking their vehicles to their dealerships soonest. Shepardson (2012: 1) added that the company had to recall several other versions built between 2006 and 2011, totalling 90 000 recalls worldwide. By this time, 81 water pump failures had been reported and four-engine fires worldwide since 2009.

However, of the 2 864 vehicles affected in South Africa since expanding the technical campaign worldwide at the end of 2018, only 50 cars have been serviced, according to Buso (2019: 1) of Cape Talk.

2.10.2 Company B

Recently, Fourie (2018: 1) reported in Cars that just less than 15 933 Company B 2007 to 2011 makes were being recalled in South Africa because the plug of the power distributor may degrade over time as a result of frictional corrosion and vehicle vibration, which can result in a loss of power. Affected owners were urged to book their cars into the franchise's workshops around the country for a free two-hour repair where an improved repair cable plug will be installed. Worldwide, there have been just under 400 000 recalls.

In May 2018, Barry (2018: 1) reported Consumer Reports that in North America, Company A and Company B are recalling 47 806 of their 2011 and 2012 models due to the auxiliary

water pump that could fail and result in the circuit board overheating and potentially leading to fire. The automaker recommended owners of the affected models park them outdoors until the recall work, where they would replace the electric auxiliary water pump for free, has been performed. Unfortunately, replacement parts were yet to be available at the time of the report. In October 2018, Company B recalled a further 27 000 of their 2011 to 2017, thus extending the recall to include diesel models. It is due to what they deem sporadic cases of glycol leakage from the engine's exhaust gas recirculation cooler as it can burn sooty deposits.

Consequently, fire can potentially erupt. For example, there have been reports of multiple fires in recent weeks in the United Kingdom, with the recall of over 268 000 cars. Globally, 1.6 million vehicles were affected (Hull, 2018: 1).

2.10.3 Company C

There was disaster amplification from the year 2015 when Company C saw a total of 48 of one of their models burst into flames, with one incident resulting in the loss of life in December 2015 when a motorist was trapped inside the burning car. Hosken (2017: 1) reported in Herald Live that this company had been aware that their 2012 to 2014 models have a potentially deadly safety flaw since 2014 and yet chose not to address the matter. Over the past two years (from 2017), various insurance companies allegedly informed Company C about the flaws after forensic investigations. In 2017, Company C decided to recall all 2012 to 2014 models for a thorough inspection, to which Buthelezi (2017: 1) said was "too little too late". Customers had been complaining and requesting the recall. Company C announced a recall for over 4 500 cars worldwide where cars could overheat, leading to the cracking of engine cylinder heads and oil leakage, which could then cause fires to burst. The company offered to redress the issue at no charge to customers and explained that the recall process would be twofold. The first stage will involve changing parts and warning systems linked to the cooling system of the engine as well as a software update. The second stage will be updating the engine again from July, and should there be repair delays as there are part shortages, customers will receive courtesy cars (Times Live, 2017: 1).

Company C shipped 15 vehicles to Europe for the cause of fires to be investigated and explained that that was the reason for the delayed recall. The company implied that high temperatures in South Africa are likely to be a factor in these fires. Drivers who detect any

signs of overheating were requested to pull over immediately and evacuate the vehicle while they wait for the company's 24/7 roadside assistance. In the meantime, the company said it would be in talks with insurance companies to help customers resolve the matter (Times Live, 2017: 1). Cameron (2017: 1) has made it clear that this incident points to flaws in management's ability to run the company executively. Cameron cites Theron-Wepener (2017: 1), who maintains that Company C ruined its reputation by failing to implement effective crisis management and communication, potentially fatal for its operations in South Africa. Theron-Wepener (2017: 1) adds that organisations are under much scrutiny as customers increasingly use social media to monitor their behaviour and become more vocal in requesting transparency, accountability and socio-environmental responsiveness.

Fuel was added to the fire when, just four months later, Company C announced another recall for 15 600 of their entry-level vehicles as they pose fire-risk. These models were built in India between 2004 and 2002 and have a hose that may split, leading to a power steering fluid leak that can then result in the emission of fumes from the engine compartment. It is also possible that the power steering fluid can come into contact with the vehicle's exhaust system components, creating the probable for smoke and fire in extreme circumstances. However, none of the 16 fires reported globally had been reported in South Africa. Again, fixing the issue was said to be at no cost for the consumers.

Following the massive 4 556 vehicle recall in Company C's South African branch in January 2017, its CEO was recalled back to America. As a result, they had to appoint a new Managing Director.

2.10.4 Company D

In February 2015, Wheels24 (2015: 1) reported that in March, Company D will recall 2200 units in South Africa, manufactured between 2013 and 2015, to fix a problem with an engine compartment seal that could ignite. Globally, 147 224 cars were affected. According to the automaker, a rubber seal silences noises at the back of the engine bay. This seal can stick to the bonnet when it opens, meaning that it can fall into the engine and increase the likelihood of fire if it comes into contact with the exhaust system. The company said it would fix the issue by attaching four more retaining clips to the seal at no charge to the clients.

Yet again in March and April 2017, Wheels24 (2017: 1), The Citizen (2017: 1) and CarZar (2017: 1) announced that in South Africa, a total of 5100 of Company D's 2015 to 2017 models were affected by an overheating starter part that could cause a fire. Internationally, it involved approximately a million cars. The company reported 51 fires worldwide. However, there were no reported injuries. If for some reason, the transmission won't turn over and repeated attempts to start the car, the current limiter can overheat and melt nearby parts. Again, the organisation promised to install another fuse for consumers at no cost, which takes an hour to do.

On the company's website, the company notes that manufacturing faults are rare for them. However, should it occur, they promise to deal with the issue quickly and professionally to cause as a minor inconvenience to the client as possible. The organisation requests clients to contact the South African dealership to confirm if their cars are affected by the recall (Mercedes-Benz, n.d.).

2.11 AN ANALYSIS OF COMPANIES A, B, C AND D

Below (Table 2.1) is a tabulated summary of the analysis of the companies' car recalls and their efforts to redress their errors.

An Analysis of Companies A, B, C and D

	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D
Recall Experienced	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Experienced Multiple Recalls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Recurring Recall Occurred in less than a Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Recall Granted at no Cost to Customer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Injuries	No	No	Yes (1 death)	No
Type of Crisis Management	Proactive	Reactive	Reactive and Recovery	Proactive

Table 2.1 An Analysis of Companies A, B, C and D

What is clear in Table 2.1 is that not only are all the companies prone to crises that all lead to recalls, but each company has experienced more than one recall, and most recurring

recalls (75 per cent) occurred within a year or less. All companies also offered to rectify their potentially deadly errors at no cost. Company A had two recalls in one year, with no injuries. It points to a proactive crisis management strategy. Company B also had two recalls in the space of five months and multiple fires. The approach of this company was reactive as fires did erupt. Company C had two recalls in four months and, unfortunately, one death. Insurance companies had previously complained about this default, which means they were reactive and focussed more on recovery in their approach to crisis management. Lastly, Company D was the only company that had another recall in two years. However, they had 51 reported fires. The company did not report any injuries. Company D was, therefore, proactive when it came to their first recall but were reactive when it came to the second recall.

2.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter has contextualised crisis communication and crisis management on both a local and global scale. The researcher also discussed the development or stages of crisis development and suitable ways for crisis managers to respond at each stage of the crisis life cycle. Successful organisations always have a crisis management and crisis communication plan documented and signed off by top management. In addition, the researcher highlighted the value of effective two-way communication as a prerequisite for successful crisis communication and crisis management. Case studies at the four selected companies that show the crises experienced by Companies A, B, C and D were factored to add to the provided theory. The next chapter offers a theoretical framework for crisis communication and management, using the most relevant approaches that match the discussed crises.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a literature review, inclusive of case studies, for crises communication and crisis management. This chapter will now contextualise the theoretical framework for crisis communication and management. Behaviour change theories will be discussed as they assist researchers to understand why individuals act in a particular way and how behaviours can change. Anani-Bossman (2018: 27) posits that theories are imperative when generalising how and why people think and behave in specific ways and determining a communication programme's most appropriate goals and objectives. The theories discussed are the Systems Theory, Chaos Theory, and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The Systems Theory is the leading theory from which the others have their roots. How the companies reacted when faced with a conflict underpins the importance of these theories.

3.2 SYSTEMS THEORY (ENTROPY AND EQUILIBRIUM)

As the business environment continues to become complex, organisations must reassess their strategic decisions regularly. However, companies tend to struggle to collect and efficiently interpret the relevant information in their business environments. Although market research is often analysed, influences from the broader environment are often neglected (Weissenberger-Eibl, Almeida and Seus, 2019: 1). The Systems Theory offers a context within which researchers can assess an organisation and its relationship with its internal and external environments. Public relations is considered a boundary spanner where practitioners link the organisation and its external environment. Public relations practitioners provide essential information to the organisation's stakeholders and construe the environment to decision-makers by continuously providing information about the opportunities and problems. It assists decision-makers to respond effectively and efficiently to such trends and changes (Anani-Bossman, 2018: 28).

The Systems Theory is one of the most universally utilised theoretical approaches to communication. It states that each system (or company) has distinctive qualities that differentiate it from other systems. Furthermore, it comprises interrelated elements (such as various stakeholders) that function as a whole to make the system function effectively,

grow and change. Amongst other principles, this theory talks about entropy and equilibrium, which pertain to how organisations are prone to chaos (entropy) and the fact that organisations then attempt to remedy it by implementing rules and regulations (equilibrium) (Louw and Du Plooy-Cilliers: 2014: 30).

Chikere and Nwoka (2015: 1) add that instead of studying the organisation according to its different elements or components, as previous scholars have done, this theory focuses on the relations and consequent interconnectedness between organisational elements and how they work together as a whole. This perspective of studying organisations or systems is referred to as a holistic approach. The said interrelated aspects of the organisation identify as different departments, sections, and units composed of independent individuals and groups that work together to accomplish a mutual organisational goal of turning its vision into reality. Open Learn (2020: 1) identifies the typical departments in an organisation: Production; Research and Development; Purchasing; Marketing; Human Resource Management; and Accounting and Finance.

Furthermore, apart from internal organisational elements, organisations function within environments and not in a vacuum and are therefore dependent on their external environments, which form part of an even larger system such as the industry to which the organisation belongs and the economic system society. This additional element of interdependence is also known as the macro environment. The existence of this environment or larger system, as a result, introduces the importance of environmental feedback, which requires organisations to develop means of adjusting to the environmental demands (Open Learn, 2020: 1). The degree of interconnectedness of the global economy suggests that understanding the systemic characteristics of the prevailing trade and financial associations, as well as recognising the prominence of their system-level network properties, is essential to evaluate economic progression and the disruptive power of crises in a globalised world (Ramos and Hynes, 2019: 10). The following section discusses the internal and external environments in which organisations operate.

3.2.1 The Internal Environment and the External Environment

Modern organisations are complex systems that are interdependent on their internal and external environments for survival. Halmaghi, Iancu and Bacila (2017: 379) characterise the internal environment as consisting of the organisation's owners, managers and leadership, employees, and material resources. Owners have a substantial influence on the other components of the internal environment as the decisions, directly or by

representation, regarding the organisation's main direction, profit distribution, development, or abolition lies with them. Managers influence the adaption of the organisation to the fruition and stimuli of the external environment. They also impact the behaviours and actions of the employees in the organisation through their decisions and actions.

According to Halmaghi, Iancu and Bacila, (2017: 1), employees determine the success or failure of the organisation through relations established between them and how determined they are to work to achieve the organisation's goals. The organisational culture refers to a system of values, ideals, beliefs and everyday conduct rules that unite members of an organisation. Organisational culture also consists of the organisation's history and present, human resources, technology and physical resources, and employees' goals, objectives, and values. Every organisation has a unique combination of these elements, meaning that organisational cultures differ. Al Rawashdeh (2019: 175) stresses that the internal environment represents one of the organisation's biggest challenges, making it imperative to analyse it. This analysis is fundamental because the organisation's potential, both material and human, are identified. The organisational strengths and weaknesses are also recognised, which helps determine its position compared to its competitors.

The external environment, on the other hand (Akpoviroro and Owotutu, 2018: 500), comprises all elements prevailing outside the boundary of the organisation, which have the potential to affect the organisation. Accordingly, they are pertinent to the organisation's operation and should thus be monitored. These elements are in Figure 3.1 on the next page.

The Macro (External) Environment

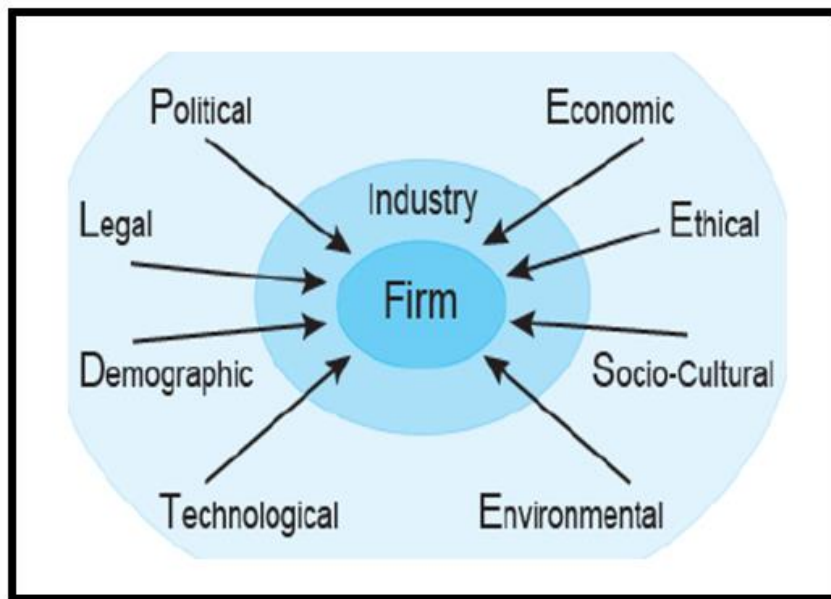


Figure 3.1 The Macro (External) Environment (Shtal, Buriak, Amirbekuly, Ukubassova, Kaskin and Toiboldinova 2018: 22)

Figure 3.1 shows the elements of the car manufacturing industry's external environment that need to be considered during environmental scanning to manage a crisis. The external or macro-environment has important organisational stakeholders that the organisation should constantly keep up to date and communicate in times of crisis.

Firstly, the **economic environment** determines and defines the opportunities for an organisation because an expanding economy provides operational scope for the organisation. However, a period of recession can bring about failures and even liquidation. Thus, the significant economic factors which affect many businesses are inflation, interest rates and unemployment (Graffin 1997 in Kowo, Olalekan and Popoola, 2018: 501). For example, the increase in repo rates may mean that fewer clients can afford to purchase cars, posing a survival threat for the car manufacturing industry.

Secondly, the **political environment** includes factors such as government regulations on business. For example, car manufacturing companies should not set up business in another country where the trade relationships are not relatively defined and stable (Ongeti 2014 in Kowo, Olalekan and Popoola, 2018: 501). Political unrests can lead to a declining economy which means investing in that particular country may be futile; thirdly, the **technological environment** changes fast, and car manufacturing organisations ought to

keep pace with it to maintain competitive advantage and survival. Organisations should forever be alert and adapt to changing technology in their business (Kowo, Olalekan and Popoola, 2018: 501). Finally, it includes the safety features and durability of cars- amongst other consumer needs.

Fourthly, the **socio-cultural environment** includes people's attitudes. For example, the family set-up, marital status, religion and education. For example, there is an increase in the demand for new bigger cars where the size of the family is big. Therefore, car manufacturing organisations should be aware of these needs from their market research information. In addition, due to the increase in literacy rate, consumers are becoming more conscious of the quality of the products they want and receive. Therefore, car manufacturing companies need to make excellent quality cars, meeting their current and prospective clients' expectations (Tacheva 2007 in Kowo, Olalekan and Popoola, 2018: 501).

Furthermore, the **environmental or natural environment** includes geographical and ecological factors that influence the business operations. These factors include the availability of natural resources, weather and climatic conditions, location factors, etc. For example, it is better to establish manufacturing units near the sources of input. It means manufacturing cars can occur at a fraction of the cost, which increases the organisations' chances of survival and success. Customers also require environmentally-friendly vehicles. Government policies maintain ecological balance, conservation responsibility on the business sector (Shaikh 210 in Kowo, Olalekan and Popoola, 2018: 502).

The **ethical and demographic environments** comprise customers, morals, values, rules, and demographical characteristics of the society in the organisation. Ethical behaviour is essential because it determines the product, services and the level of conduct that the society is likely to get and allows for a cordial relationship between management, workers and their customers (Kowo, Olalekan and Popoola, 2018: 502). Customers, for example, require car manufacturing companies to be honest and open about any defects they find in their cars. It should be done as a matter of urgency to maintain customer trust, loyalty and rapport. Failing to do this will result in losing customers and a potential end to the business.

Lastly, the **legal environment** is where government passes laws and regulations on industries, which has a considerable effect and impact on car manufacturing companies. These laws and regulations impact investments and job creation (Adeoye 2012 in Kowo, Olalekan and Popoola, 2018: 502). The Competition Commission, for example, ruled in 2021 that consumers no longer have to service their vehicles at the original dealership to keep their warranty in place. It means competitive and affordable prices for the consumer, but car manufacturing companies may have to relook at their price structures to retain their clients.

As seen above, external environments significantly influence car manufacturing companies, which means they operate as open systems. The researcher discusses the phenomena of open systems below.

3.2.2 The Nature of Open Systems

The focus of this study is on car manufacturing organisations operating as open systems. Weissenberger-Eibl, Almeida and Seus (2019: 1) characterise open systems as systems that interact with other systems or the outside environment. Alter (2018: 5) confirms that open systems have interrelatedness and interconnectedness with their external environment. As open systems, organisations constantly interact with their environments to modify themselves and grow. For inputs to be transformed into outputs and meet the organisation's objectives, there is a need for constant feedback from the stakeholders in the environment. Upon analysing the feedback, information then needs to be sent back to the environment. Thus, a two-way discourse is necessary for the survival of the organisation. As evident above, car manufacturing companies must interact and comply with various external environment sectors to avoid crises. These organisations' success and continuity are heavily dependent on reciprocal interaction with their external and internal environments.

A change in the environment affects the system, and systematic changes also influence the external environment. The external environment is where organisational key stakeholders are found, such as customers, the general public or society, and the government. Therefore, the organisation's public relations department needs to ensure that it understands the environment in which it operates through effective environmental scanning and constant evaluations. Mukhtar (2018: 21) adds, in agreement, that symmetric two-way communication is utilised by organisations that aim to practice

excellent public relations as it offers an ethical and professional framework. Ethical and dialogue-based communication is used to enhance rapport and a positive organisational image. It is done by organisations researching to understand their publics and including them in discourses to resolve controversial issues and modify organisational practices as per the demands of the public.

The key objectives are to, firstly, negotiate with the public through the provision of accurate information. Secondly, organisations must resolve conflict by providing appropriate solutions and then encourage reciprocated understanding and respect between the organisation and its publics by implementing an open and ethical communication policy (Mukhtar, 2018: 21).

Chikere and Nwoka (2015: 4) add four elements of open systems, namely:

3.2.2.1 *Relations with the external environment*

Open systems continuously evolve and adapt to the needs of the environment, which makes modern organisations open systems;

3.2.2.2 *Variables considered*

Open systems have more complex interrelationships. In an open system, these costs and quality are seen as externally driven and require an understanding of the influences of the environment on these variables for them to be managed.

3.2.2.3 *Form of regulation or control*

Open systems utilise anticipatory control. In open systems, possible errors are anticipated as much as possible before they occur and then take corrective measures before the final output. It is particularly imperative as waiting for feedback from mistakes may be fatal. Hence this “feed-forward” form of control is employed. If an open system needs to manage product cost, this process must be controlled before production and not after; and

3.2.2.4 *Purpose of regulation*

In open systems, regulation is in place for adjustments and progress to occur. Open systems are on a constant quest for improvement and not mere stability; thus, they aim to achieve dynamic equilibrium.

The willingness of organisations to adjust and change their actions and policies for the greater good of all parties involved makes such communication effective in open systems.

Martínez-Berumen, López-Torres and Romo-Rojas (2014: 389) then acknowledge the following as the main concepts of an open system:

3.2.2.5 Entropy

Entropy is the disorder or uncertainty that occurs in a complex system. Complex systems are dissipative, meaning that they can remain imbalanced, which challenges their inherent tendency to reach a state of equilibrium. Entropy, therefore, acts as an attractor of the system. Gell-Mann (1995) and Ben-Naim (2008) highlight that entropy and information are closely associated and entropy is a result of ignorance because the level of entropy translates to the degree of ignorance of the microstate; and

3.2.2.6 Equilibrium

Equilibrium is the organisational process of facing and adapting to the demands imposed by its environment. Complex systems (Friedman and Allen, 2014: 6) also tend to be self-organised in that they can avoid the effect of increasing entropy by spontaneously forming order out of the disorder. It requires internal elements that maintain internal heterogeneities, eradicating or counteracting fluctuations that could destroy them. Thus a system's sustainability is dependent on its ability to decrease entropy, meaning that an organisation remains sustainable when it survives and thrives even under changing conditions.

Friedman and Allen (2014: 6) choose the term **adaption** instead of equilibrium, adding that this process also includes how a system can incorporate resources from its external environment. Adaption compels reciprocal interaction and exchanges between the system and its environment, changing both systems, and Stichweh (n.d.) states that this is **integration**.

Richards (2017: 1)' perspective of the theory focuses explicitly on communication, deemed the most imperative element of the entire business- inside and out. Instead of having separate communication processes, organisations ensure that the messages communicated to various stakeholders are consistent and aligned. It is particularly imperative for organisations whose philosophy is centred around audiences receiving the same messages at the right time and through the most effective channels. Figure 3.2 on the following page represents organisations as open systems.

Organisations as Open Systems

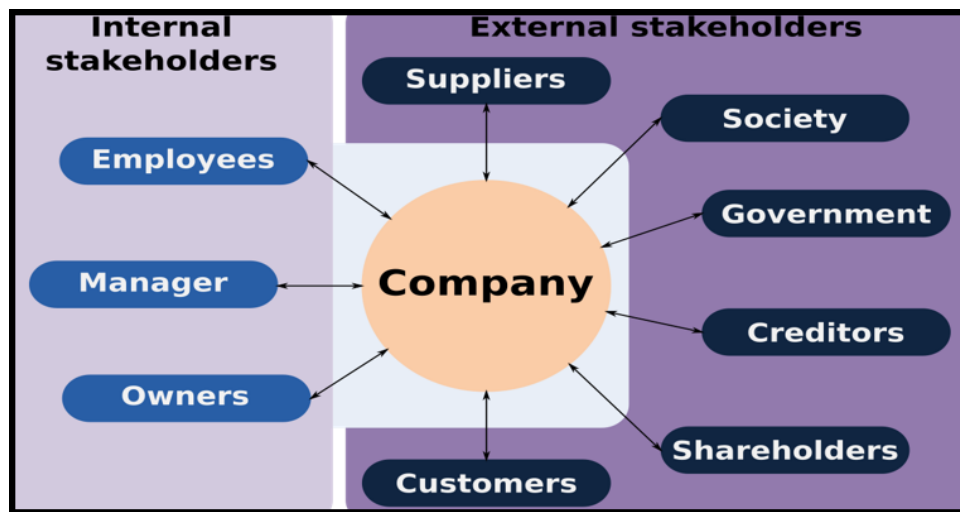


Figure 3.2 Organisations as Open Systems (Mazhawidza 2021: 21)

Figure 3.2 shows the organisation interacting, in a reciprocal manner, with its internal and external environments. Externally, the stakeholders could be competitors, customers, suppliers, media outlets, the government, etc. Thus, information flows into the organisation, coming from various organisational stakeholders. The organisation also sends feedback in the form of offerings. This constant reciprocal communication and interaction are vital for the survival of organisations as organisations can be aware of and monitor issues in the early stages and keep the various stakeholders up to date with any problems and crises.

Having discussed that open systems or organisations are complex, it is imperative to examine the extent to which (or just how) a situation may start as minor (such as an issue) but develop into a crisis if not attended to effectively.

3.3 CHAOS THEORY

Alshammari *et al.* (2016: 1) cite Smith (2007), saying that the Chaos Theory is the study of how current phenomena (such as minor changes or behaviour) that seems insignificant can have immense consequences for the future- such an occurrence is also known as the butterfly effect. It alludes to the interconnected nature of complex systems. The premise of the theory is that organisations (systems) dwell in the hub of chaos. In agreement, Galacgac and Singh (2016: 1) characterise chaos as confusion, disorder, and lack of control, adding that the dynamic world in which organisations operate is chaotic and unpredictable. Indeed, with the constant advancing of technology and continued

adaptability, coupled with humans' complex creatures who function in complex systems (organisations), organisations are prone to chaos.

The behaviour of complex systems is very sensitive to the slightest of changes in conditions, which results in minor changes giving rise to more unpredictable, prominent effects on the system. Humans then attempt to control or remove the darkness and uncertainty of this chaos (Galacgac and Singh, 2016: 1). Thus, according to Levy (2017: 168), this requires or translates to strategic planning and forecasting organisational phenomena and the impact of change on organisations and industries. This theory is an extension of the Systems Theory.

The central tenet of the chaos theory is the system's sensitivity to initial conditions, better known as the butterfly effect (Getchell, 2016: 18). As part of the Chaos Theory, the butterfly effect is about how small changes can significantly impact large systems as the impact ripples through a system of interconnected, complex relationships. An analogy is made of a butterfly merely flapping its wings but eventually causing a tornado to erupt from the cumulative ripple of the flapping. This illustrates how small changes can result in significant changes, especially when they build upon each other. What seems like a minor complaint or opinion to the organisation has the power to cause a big stir that demands immediate responsiveness when it starts receiving a lot of attention. The lesson here is that any change begins with one person voicing out, which gains momentum as the topic diffuses amongst the organisation's stakeholders (Wirth, 2016: 1).

Galacgac and Singh (2016: 521) add that the short-term outcome of the 'flapping butterfly wings' is unpredictable. However, there will be irregular outcomes that the complex system will eventually iterate and become accustomed to in the long term, thus returning to its state of equilibrium. It obliges organisations to be flexible and adaptive in their processes and procedures. Agreeably, Rouse (2019: 1) then breaks the theory into two main components. First, the premise idea of the theory is that regardless of the level of complexity in systems, they rely on underlying order. Secondly, simple or small techniques (sub-systems) and events have the power to cause very complex behaviours or events. Chaos, therefore, occurs in complex open systems due to interactions amongst the interconnected systems.

In contrast, Llorca and Cordero (2016: 47) debate that chaotic systems never reach a stable equilibrium and add that contemporary organisations are more concerned with attaining the minimal stability required to achieve the organisation's objectives. Since the socio-economic environment is ever-changing, stability is tough to reach for organisations in any case. Instability is the organisation's activities being experimental, incoherent, diverse, and divergent. These are sources of internal disorder that could result in significant changes in the future. In addition, it is nearly impossible to make long-term predictions because unexpected dramatic changes occur in chaotic systems. Therefore, what is most important is being adaptive and flexible. Agreeably, Schulze and Pinkow (2020: 2) emphasise that organisations are confronted with a major challenge of becoming adaptable in complex environments as they experience change and uncertainty often.

Getchell (2016: 19) then argues that organisations in a crisis ultimately utilise a chaotic system and that risk and crisis communication are ideal for applying the chaos theory. Finally, Franklin (2020: 45) stressed that systems require feedback from their environments to maintain a sense of stability due to their constant evolution and transformation nature. Positive feedbacks assist the chaotic systems in evolving by introducing new patterns, while negative feedbacks, on the other hand, help the systems to maintain stability. An analogy used by scholars is that of a sound system with the microphone placed in front of a speaker. In such a configuration, the system's output from the speaker becomes its input, which reintroduces the sound distortion in the system and iteratively amplifies it. Similarly, each output in a chaotic system provides elements for a new outcome. With such a recursive process, there are possibilities of bifurcating to a different path, thus changing the system's state.

Since it is evident that all organisations are prone to chaos and may begin as a supposed minor issue, organisations need to categorise potential crises to prioritise them and devise suitable responses.

3.4 SITUATIONAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION THEORY (SCCT)

SCCT stems from a belief that crisis participants constantly have a psychological attitude towards the crisis, affecting how the concerned parties interact (Kyrychok 2017: 55). The connection between events and emotions creates the foundation for this theory. This theory helps organisations understand the public's response and, consequently, their

crisis response strategy (Rouweler, 2020: 6). SCCT consists of three key elements: the crisis (clusters), crisis response strategies, and a system that matches it with a suitable crisis response strategy (Cooley and Cooley, 2011: 205).

Coomb and Holladay (2014: 67) add that the SCCT assumes the organisational reputation- how the organisation public view it - does a crisis threaten a valuable resource. Therefore, the crisis management team should select a crisis response strategy that fits the extent of probable reputational damage it may inflict. The higher the potential for reputational damage, the more there is a need for the crisis response strategy to accommodate the crisis victims. The public tends to hold the organisation more accountable for the crisis and expect care towards the victims.

In agreement, Holdsworth (2014: 1), Bayarong (2015: 1), Van Rensburg, Conradie and Dondolo (2017: 64) articulate that the SCCT stems from the Attribution Theory, which states that people search for a cause of events, particularly those that are unfavourable and unanticipated. Furthermore, they emphasise that this theory provides crisis response solutions at the post-crisis stage, and the crisis is occurring for a while. SCCT thus suggests that the effectiveness of the crisis response depends on assessing the consequent reputational threat for the organisation.

Tripp (2016: 166) says that SCCT stresses the importance of the crisis manager in examining the crisis to assess the level of the reputational threat. The first reputational threat is initial crisis responsibility which talks about how stakeholders believe organisational actions caused it. The second reputational threat is crisis history, and it talks about whether or not the organisation has previously had a crisis of a similar nature. The last reputational threat is prior relational reputation, which is about how well or poorly an organisation has or is perceived to have treated stakeholders in other contexts.

In the automotive industry, the organisation's reputation also plays a significant role in the buying decision. Consumers are reluctant to buy from organisations that have a history of crises. A good reputation stems from numerous quantifiable and non-measurable elements. Reputation allows the organisation to benefit from attracting well-trained employees, investors, and business partners. Quantitatively, a good reputation may result from years of investment in public relations, marketing and advertising, or intangible assets

such as customer care, corporate social investment, employee care, and relations with business partners (Sandu, 2015: 1035).

3.4.1 The crisis clusters

Identifying the type of crisis or placing the occurrence in a crisis cluster is the initial step in assessing the organisation's accountability. The different organisational crises are three categories, which determine the level of responsibility at which the organisation is placed for the crisis at hand, namely (Holdsworth, 2014: 1; Coomb and Holladay, 2014: 179; Van Rensburg, Conradie and Dondolo, 2017: 64):

- **The Victim Cluster**

In this cluster, the organisation is as much a victim of the crisis as the stakeholders. Organisations that detach themselves from it and refuse to take responsibility for it to fall under this category (Labonte, 2021: 9). Natural disasters, rumours, workplace violence, and product tampering are the types in this category. Organisations are held accountable for the crisis at a very minimal level, if at all.

- **The Accidental Cluster**

Due to the crises in this category being unintentional by the organisation (Labonte, 2021: 10), they are called accidental. Technical breakdowns (accidents and product recalls), mega damage and challenges are part of the accidental cluster, and moderate accountability is on organisations for the crises.

- **The Preventable Cluster**

Human-inflicted breakdowns (accidents and product recall), organisational misdeeds (whether an injury or non-injury-causing), and management misconduct categorise this cluster as organisations create these crises by deliberately placing stakeholders at risk. It can be done by organisations purposely taking inappropriate actions, violating laws or regulations, and avoiding human error. Strong accountability for the crisis is placed on the organisation by the stakeholders (Holdsworth, 2014: 1; Coomb and Holladay, 2014: 179 and Van Rensburg, Conradie and Dondolo, 2017: 64).

To distinguish the cluster to which the crisis belongs, Page Center Training (2019d: 1) suggests that crisis managers answer the following three questions:

- Can the organisation be perceived as a victim of the event?

- Was the event a result of unintentional factors that the organisation is unable to control?
- Can the event be prevented?

3.4.2 Crisis Response Strategies

Cooley and Cooley (2011: 205), as well as Van Rensburg, Conradie and Dondolo (2017: 65), cite Coombs (2007), who distinguishes between four response strategy categories that the crisis management team can use to respond to crises to repair the organisational reputation and reduce the adverse effects. Below are the categories:

3.4.2.1 Denying the Crisis

Here organisations remove themselves from the crisis by attacking the accuser, denial or scapegoating (Labonte 2021, 11). When responding to the accuser, the crisis manager confronts the person, group or entity that claims something wrong with the organisation. Denying the crisis means the organisation asserts that there is no crisis, and scapegoating occurs when the organisation blames an entity or person outside the organisation (Cooley and Cooley, 2011: 205).

3.4.2.2 Diminishing the Crisis

The crisis manager can also argue that the crisis is not as bad as people make it out to be. Once people see it less negatively, it potentially leads to a reduction in the harmful effects. The organisation can thus use the excuse strategy, where it denies that it intended to cause any harm or claim that it had no control over the events that triggered the crisis. Alternatively, the organisation can use the justification strategy by minimising the resultant perceived damage (Van Rensburg, Conradie and Dondolo, 2017: 65).

3.4.2.3 Rebuilding as a Crisis Response Strategy

By offering compensation (money or other gifts) to victims of the crisis or apologising and taking full responsibility, and then asking for forgiveness, the organisation can improve its reputation (Cooley and Cooley, 2011: 205).

3.4.2.4 Bolstering as a Crisis Response Strategy

Organisations can use the strategies in this category to supplement the above three strategies (Van Rensburg, Conradie and Dondolo, 2017: 66). For example, the

organisation can commend stakeholders on the excellent work during the crisis (reminder strategy) and remind them of the organisation's past good work (ingratiation) to draw upon the goodwill and help protect its reputation. Additionally, the organisation can utilise the victim strategy to remind stakeholders that the organisation is also a victim of the crisis. On the next page is a model that represents how Situational Crisis Communication works.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory in Summary

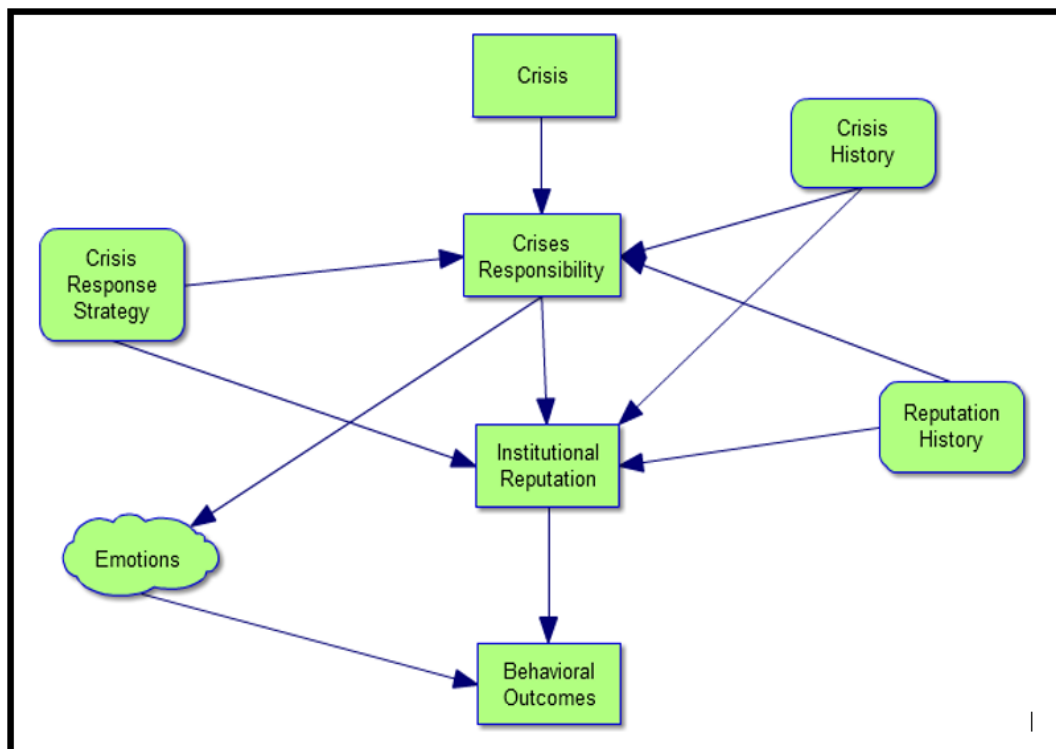


Figure 3.3 Situational Crisis Communication Theory in Summary (Kyrychok, 2017:56)

Figure 3.3 indicates that a crisis has to occur for crisis communication to take place. To determine their accountability, organisations then categorise the crisis at hand into a category where the organisation is either the victim, unintentional accident, or preventable. The chosen response strategy could be denial, diminishing, rebuilding, or bolstering, which translates to the organisation's reputation. The crisis history, response strategy selected, and organisation's reputation history also play a role in shaping the organisation's level of accountability and its reputation. The crisis responsibility speaks to the public's emotions regarding the crisis, and emotions, along with the organisation's reputation, evoke the organisation's behavioural outcomes. The desired results are adjustments and changes in the organisation, as per the public's suggestions (Kyrychok, 2017:56).

3.4.3 Matching the Crisis Situation with the Suitable Crisis Response Strategy

At the heart of the crisis situation theory is the notion of matching the organisation's response strategy to the nature of the crisis, warranted by the organisation's crisis responsibility level of acceptance and potential reputational damage (Gribas, DiSanza, Legge and Hartman, 2018: 225). This theory states that crisis communication becomes more effective at protecting the organisation's reputation by prioritizing stakeholders' emotional reactions when selecting response strategies. As the reputational threat and adverse effects of a crisis increase, crisis managers should use crisis response strategies that require accepting responsibility. For example, the lack of strong emotions in the accident crisis cluster allows for using the excuse and justification strategies. If organisations have an adverse performance history, they should select response strategies that accept greater accountability for the crisis and exhibit high concern and sympathy for the victims (Van Rensburg, Conradie and Dondolo, 2017: 67).

Adverse performance history increases the reputational threat and thus alters otherwise appropriate response strategies (Payton, 2021: 41). How organisations manage the pre-crisis phase (prevention and preparation) and the post-crisis phase (learning from mistakes and successes) also influences the effectiveness of the crisis response. Due to the dynamics of social media, there is limited time to think about a crisis response thoroughly. Hence, they can save time in the preparation phase. This theory adopts a reactive crisis response (Van Rensburg, Conradie and Dondolo, 2017: 67). Table 3.1 on the following page shows the various types of crises and their response strategies.

Types of Crises Situations and Response Strategies

Crisis Types	Crisis response strategies	
Victim Cluster	Deny crisis response strategies	
Natural disaster	Attack the accuser	Crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization.
Rumor	Denial	Crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis.
Workplace violence	Scapegoat	Crisis manager blames some person or group outside of the organization for the crisis.
Product tampering/ malevolence		
Accidental Cluster	Diminish crisis response strategies	
Challenges	Excuse	Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.
Technical-error accidents		
Technical-error product harm	Justification	Crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis.
Preventable Cluster	Rebuild crisis response strategies	
Human-error accidents	Compensation	Crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims.
Human-error product harm	Apology	Crisis manager indicates the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness
Organisational misdeed with no injuries		
Organisational misdeed management misconduct		
Organisational misdeed with injuries		

Table 3.1 Types of Crises Situations and Response Strategies (Zamani, Giaglis and Kasimati, 2015: 1)

Table 3.1 summarises several response strategies corresponding to the type of crisis considered the most applicable and practical. First, the organisation sees themselves as victims, meaning that the occurrence was not their fault; they can deny the crisis and consequently the responsibility by attacking the accuser, denying or scapegoating by blaming external entities. Second, when it is accidental, the organisation is advised to diminish the crisis by either explaining why and how it occurred or minimising its responsibility. Alternatively, the organisation may justify the crisis occurrence, which also involves minimising the perceived damage caused by the crisis. Lastly, if it is preventable, the organisation needs to rebuild its image by compensating victims and apologising to them while taking full responsibility and asking for forgiveness.

The Systems Theory, Chaos Theory and Situational Crisis Communication Theory have been discussed analytically, documenting their theoretical foundations. As the main theoretical frameworks for this study, it is imperative that these theories apply to the crisis cases identified in this study of Companies A, B, C and D.

3.5 LINKING THE THEORIES TO THE STUDY

The researcher illustrates how each theory is relevant to the crises at Companies A, B, C and D, stemming from literature found in case studies,

3.5.1 Systems Theory

Companies A, B, C and D are complex open systems interdependent and interconnected to their environments (Akpoviroro and Owotutu, 2018: 500). To achieve their goals, these companies require constant communication and feedback to occur with their various stakeholders. It is especially imperative as all companies are prone to crises and need to work with all stakeholders to alleviate them.

Company C's cars bursting into flames (TMG Digital, 2016: 1) caused entropy as there was unrest amongst society regarding the crisis. Company C then sought to reach a state of equilibrium by attempting to dampen the crisis' adverse effects by motioning a free recall of the cars for examination and repair. Nonetheless, the re-occurrence of the fire-risk malfunction for Company A, B and D illustrates just how prone companies are to chaos, and by actioning recalls at no cost to the consumers, the companies remedied the crises.

3.5.2 Chaos Theory

Indeed, the crisis at Company C proved to cause chaos for the organisation as what started as mere factory faults ended up in a fatal fire and potential lawsuits from consumers and insurance companies. Furthermore, Companies A, B and D saw their fire-risk crises occur more than once, which ascertains that organisations constantly find themselves in chaotic situations which start as minor faults but can escalate (Buthelezi, 2017: 1). These crises all started as issues where a few people voiced their complaints, and when the complaints went unnoticed, the issues developed into crises. Furthermore, the complaints on social media amplified the crisis as information and images spread rapidly, not awarding the companies enough time and capacity to respond to each post.

Organisations must identify possible issues and categorise them into clusters or potential crises, given that chaos in complex systems is inevitable. In addition, organisations then need to be able to identify effective responses. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory will further discuss this phenomenon.

3.5.3 Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Regarding Company C's saga, TMG Digital (2016: 1) says one of the owners of the cars that burst into flames had noticed that his engine light kept turning on- three times in the space of a week- and so he took it to the dealership for the technicians to examine it. Companies A, B, C and D all investigated and found that the technical malfunctions in their cars could lead to the vehicles catching fire. Tripp (2016: 166) then adds that the SCCT postulates that by understanding the crisis, the crisis manager will determine which crisis response strategy or strategies can maximise the organisation's reputational protection. Hosken (2017: 1) reported that in January 2017 Company C recalled all of the problematic 2012 to 2014 models for investigations and solutions to stop the fires. All four companies opted to recall their challenging cars, which translates to the companies taking responsibility for the crises and dealing with or addressing them.

To match the crisis with an adequate response, it is of utmost importance to consider whether or not and to what extent social media plays or plays a role in the development of the crisis.

3.6 CONCLUSION

Various behaviour change theories and models have been discussed as possible theoretical frameworks employed by organisations to understand how crisis communication and crisis management can be managed. Firstly, the Systems Theory was discussed as the leading theory that gave birth to other frameworks. Illustrations in figures (diagrams) and tables were also used to visually summarise the discussed theoretical framework for crisis communication and management. The Chaos Theory was then discussed, stating that all systems are prone to chaos and that chaos can result from something that seems as minor as customer feedback. Lastly, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory further discussed how understanding the crisis at hand is essential for devising an effective response strategy. The researcher also linked the theories to the study for further illustration of their significance. The next chapter will discuss the methodology used to collect and analyse information in this study efficiently.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the global and local background of crisis communication, which included illustrations and a theoretical framework on the phenomena. This chapter discusses the methodology employed to collect and analyse data for the study effectively. This chapter will elaborate on the research design, target population, data collection methods, pilot testing, validity and reliability, data analysis, limitations, delimitations, and ethical considerations employed in this study. This study critically assesses crisis communication at selected car manufacturing companies in Gauteng, South Africa. Crisis communication is a vital aspect of an organisation's communication and public relations division concerned with the organisation's reputation or credibility.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A research design is the framework or blueprint of methods and techniques for research. Choosing the correct research design is vital as it determines data collection techniques and sources. Every study begins with a list of research questions that need to be assessed through the research design (Sileyew, 2020: 28) and (Kassu, 2019: 1). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016: 163) agreeably add that a research design is a general plan related to how the researcher aims to answer the research questions at hand. Research questions must be clearly defined for accurate information to be obtained. Research can be designed to fulfil either an exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, or evaluative purpose, or a combination of these.

4.2.1 Different types of research

It is essential to first explain different types of research before choosing one that best suits the study. Explanatory, exploratory, evaluative and descriptive types of research are discussed below.

4.2.1.1 Explanatory Research

Bentouhami, Casas and Weyler (2021: 3) explain that explanatory research has no intention of providing final and conclusive answers. Instead, it allows the researcher to phenomena with varying levels of depths. It examines and shapes the foundation for different inquiries, meaning that it is the building block for other researchers. Explanatory research is employed where there is a sparse study on a topic.

4.2.1.2 Exploratory Research

Exploratory research (Maree, 2020: 61) is used when researchers has little or no knowledge on the phenomenon they are studying. The aim of exploring is to identify the main issues and key variables and to acquire greater understanding of the phenomenon. To effectively explore the phenomenon being studied, the researcher must approach it with two special orientations: being open minded about where data can be obtained and flexibility when looking for the data. Exploratory studies are primarily inductive and work hand-in-hand with an emerging theoretical framework.

4.2.1.3 Evaluative Research

According to du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2014: 79) Evaluative research attempts to indicate the result or accomplishment of phenomenon. This form of research mainly focusses on the measurement of a process' results, rather than the process itself, as it determines if and the extent to which a process has produced the desired results. For strategic decision making, evaluative research is applied in organisations.

4.2.1.4 Descriptive Research

Mishra and Alok (2017: 2) state that descriptive research has the purpose of explaining a set of circumstances and consists of a survey and other fact-finding investigation types. A central feature of a descriptive study is that the researcher does not have direct control over variables. Thus the researcher can only report what is currently occurring or what has occurred. Researchers also use comparative and correlation methods in descriptive studies.

This study is descriptive as the researcher requires detailed, comprehensive information regarding crisis communication management at the selected companies. A descriptive approach is relevant as this study defines and describes phenomena and inherent patterns by analysing interview responses and case studies. Furthermore, the researcher compares how the sampled populations view the phenomenon, resulting in either a link,

deviation, or a mixture of findings. Finally, the researcher coded the similarities and differences under themes for further analysis.

4.2.2 Research Methodology

Research methods or methodology refers to the path through which a researcher needs or goes about conducting their research. It includes the approach through which the researcher formulates the research problem, objectives and or research questions and how they represent the results obtained during the study or research. The research method may be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed (Kassu, 2019: 1). Open Learn (2019: 1) explains that the most imperative methodological choice that researchers face is choosing between conducting qualitative and quantitative research. For this study, the researcher adopted qualitative research.

4.2.2.1 Qualitative Research

Haradhan (2018: 1) states that qualitative research is inductive research that explores meanings and insight in given situations. It comprises a range of data collection and analysis techniques that use purposive sampling and semi-structured, open-ended interviews. This social science research works with non-numerical data and explores and interprets the meaning of social life by studying targeted populations or places. Qualitative research explains how and why a particular phenomenon occurs the way it does in a specific context. In agreement, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016: 168) add that qualitative research often links to an interpretive philosophy. It depends on the researchers' need to comprehend the subjective and socially constructed meanings of the phenomenon under investigation.

Research of this nature is naturalistic. It requires researchers to operate within natural settings or research contexts to establish trust, participation, assesses meanings, and acquire an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Qualitative research studies examine participants' connotations and the correlation between those meanings using varied data collection techniques and analytical procedures to develop a conceptual framework and theoretical contribution. Data collection is non-standardised, allowing for questions and methods to be altered and emerge as needed during the research process that is both naturalistic and interactive. The researcher's success is thus reliant on gaining

physical access to participants, building rapport, and showing sensitivity to gain cognitive access to their information (Haradhan 2018: 1; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016: 168).

4.2.2.2 Quantitative Research

As stated by Cypress (2017: 254), quantitative research has a structured, rigid, pre-set design where the methods are all prescribed and results are measurable. Almalki (2016: 290), in addition, clarifies that quantitative research is considered a deductive approach to research where hypotheses can be formulated, tested, and reproduced. Researchers conduct data collection and analysis using mathematically based methods centred on gathering numerical data and generalising it across individuals. In addition, researchers use techniques such as polls and surveys for data collection.

4.2.2.3 Mixed Method Research

Almalki (2016: 291) mentions that mixed research methods employ qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis approaches. Results from one method inform another.

This study is purely qualitative due to the need for exploring, describing, and understanding crisis communication processes from the points of view of the selected target groups and analysed case studies. Therefore, the patterns derived need not be quantified but rather comprehensively understood. In principle, this research focuses on deriving the meaning of a phenomenon based on participants' experiences, opinions, and realities. Therefore, qualitative research best suits this study due to the need for this study. The researcher wants to explore meanings and gain more insight into what crisis management and crisis communication are. The researcher also chose this method because it uses words to interpret meanings to understand the earlier phenomena. Thus, answering the questions to how and why.

4.3 TARGET POPULATION AND SCOPE

In their quest to contribute to academic discourse and knowledge, researchers collect information from participants. These participants belong to the research population, the group of people who have one or more characteristics of interest for the study. Thus, the population targeted plays a vital role in the quest to acquire accurate and relevant knowledge. Furthermore, as the primary source of data, the target population influences the credibility of the research, which is a fundamental requirement for research.

Researchers, therefore, have to sufficiently understand their target population and its relevance to the study (Asiamah, Mensah and Oteng-Abayie, 2017: 1607).

Clearly defining or specifying the target population is vital as it guides others in appraising the credibility of the sample chosen, the sampling technique(s), and the research outcomes. A qualitative researcher often draws a relatively small sample from a large study population comprising equitably eligible members. It implies drawing “the most appropriate” selection from the entire population to maximise the study's credibility. These would be the people who will provide the most accurate and in-depth information (Asiamah, Mensah and Oteng-Abayie, 2017: 1609). The targeted population for this study were the crisis management teams of Companies A and B. The sample size was eight participants from the various car manufacturing companies.

4.3.1 Purposive Sampling

This study uses purposive sampling to choose the target population because the researcher selects only those who meet the predefined criteria. The selected eight individuals are knowledgeable and experienced when it comes to crisis management and crisis communication. It is essential to note the sample's willingness to participate in this study (Alvi, 2016: 30). The sampled target population for this study are thus Company A and B's Crisis Management Teams at their headquarters in Gauteng, South Africa, as they have defined roles to play in the event of crises in these organisations. The Crisis management team was chosen as the target population because they actively attempt to remedy it and interact with various organisational stakeholders.

4.4 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

A qualitative research design may utilise a single data collection technique, such as semi-structured interviews and a corresponding analytical procedure. Thus, it refers to a mono method qualitative study. Alternatively, the researcher could employ multi-method qualitative research to use more than one qualitative data collection technique and corresponding analytical procedure. This study uses the latter as semi-structured, in-depth interviews and case studies used to deduce information. Furthermore, since the researcher will conduct interviews face-to-face, the researcher will record the interview process using a Dictaphone to ensure accurate interpretation of provided answers (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016: 168).

The interviews will consist of open-ended questions administered to the Crisis Management Team from the selected sample. The interviews will be done face-to-face and will take 40 minutes per session. The researcher recorded them using a Dictaphone for accurate findings, conclusions, and recommendations to be provided by the researcher. In addition, a dictaphone allows the researcher to replay the interview, which allows precise analysis and recording of findings, and in turn, the researcher makes accurate recommendations. The researcher also used case studies from credible, relevant primary and secondary sources to assess the planning and management of crisis communication at Company A, B, C, and D. These sources include, but are not limited to, company websites, newspaper articles, online magazines, and journals.

Furthermore, as per the South African Government (2021), COVID19 protocols were adhered to as the researcher and participants:

- Wore face masks (covering the nose and mouth);
- Sanitised their hands;
- Had no symptoms of flu or COVID19; and
- Were separated by transparent company shields.

4.4.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Haradhan (2018: 2) states that interviews are an imperative technique for primary data collection, and they involve verbal communication between the researcher and the target population. Researchers use interviews in survey designs and exploratory and descriptive studies. Approaches to interviewing can be completely unstructured, semi-structured or highly structured. The interview design and question phrasing influence the depth and freedom with which the interviewee can respond. With semi-structured interviews, the topics or questions are planned before the interview and are open-ended questions (Howitt and Cramer, 2020: 300). Open-ended questions provide an opportunity for the interviewer and interviewee to discuss the topic under investigation exhaustively critically. It also allows the interviewer to use cues or prompts to encourage the interviewee to elaborate on answers deemed brief. The researcher can record the interviewee's responses or write them down. Successfully developing an interview schedule, conducting an interview, and analysing the interview data all necessitate rigorous consideration and planning.

Furthermore, conducting face-to-face interviews enables the interviewer to pay attention to the interviewee's non-verbal behaviour and establish a rapport as time goes by. Although it is very labour intensive, personal interviews can be the most efficient high-quality data collection method. Therefore, such interviews are preferred when the subject matter is highly sensitive, if the questions are complex or if the interview will be lengthy. In addition, face-to-face interviews allow for flexibility in that a skilled interviewer gets to clarify the purpose of the interview and encourage participants to cooperate in a non-coercive manner (Haradhan, 2018: 1).

The researcher can also clarify questions while also asking follow-up questions. To establish rapport, the researcher must introduce themselves, explain the need to conduct their study and enlighten the participants about why the researcher chose them to provide data for the researcher. Participants also need to be told what will happen to the interview data and be encouraged to ask the interviewer questions. The researcher thus requires reflective questioning, summarising, time-management and controlling skills for the interview to flow effectively (Yeong, Ismail, and Hassim, 2018: 2702).

Yeong, Ismail, and Hassim (2018: 2702) thus propose that researchers should follow an interview protocol as it is key to obtaining reliable qualitative information. The protocol expedites the interview process by involving several groups of people systematically, consistently, and all-inclusive through prior delimitation of the phenomena explored. The interview protocol should follow the following four stages:

Stage 1: Aligning interview questions with research questions

Aligning interview questions with research questions or objectives increases the effectiveness of the interview questions. It ensures that the research questions are necessary for the study (Yeong, Ismail, and Hassim, 2018: 2700).

Stage 2: Construction of an inquiry-based conversation

At this stage, the researcher must refine the research questions from formal academic language to daily conversation discourse where necessary. So it is because the research questions are formulated based on the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon. In contrast, the researcher phrases the interview questions to understand participants' perceptions of that area of study (Yeong, Ismail, and Hassim, 2018: 2701).

Stage 3: Receiving feedback from interview protocol

This stage involves receiving reviews on the feasibility of the interview protocol from other qualified researchers in the field. The researcher examines the interview, writing style, and ease of understanding the research questions (Yeong, Ismail, and Hassim, 2018: 2702).

Stage 4: Piloting of the interview protocol

The final stage entails testing the research instrument to ensure that it can perform the desired job as per the requirements of the research objectives. It would involve testing the open-ended interview questionnaire on a smaller group of individuals, simulating the actual interview process in their natural environment (Yeong, Ismail, and Hassim, 2018: 2700-2702).

For this study, the interview protocol was followed by first formulating relevant questions aligned with the research objectives. Then, these questions were phrased in simple English to gain participants' understanding of the phenomena. After that, the researcher's supervisors reviewed the interview schedule to determine whether it was feasible and whether the questions were understandable or not- this points to initial face validity. Finally, the researcher conducted a pilot test to practically test the interview questions. Here, the researcher devised the possible follow-up questions should there be a need for further clarity from participants and questions themselves can also be re-worded should the need arise. This points to initial reliability. Figure 4.1, on below, shows the steps to follow to conduct an effective interview. It is the interview protocol.

The Interview Protocol

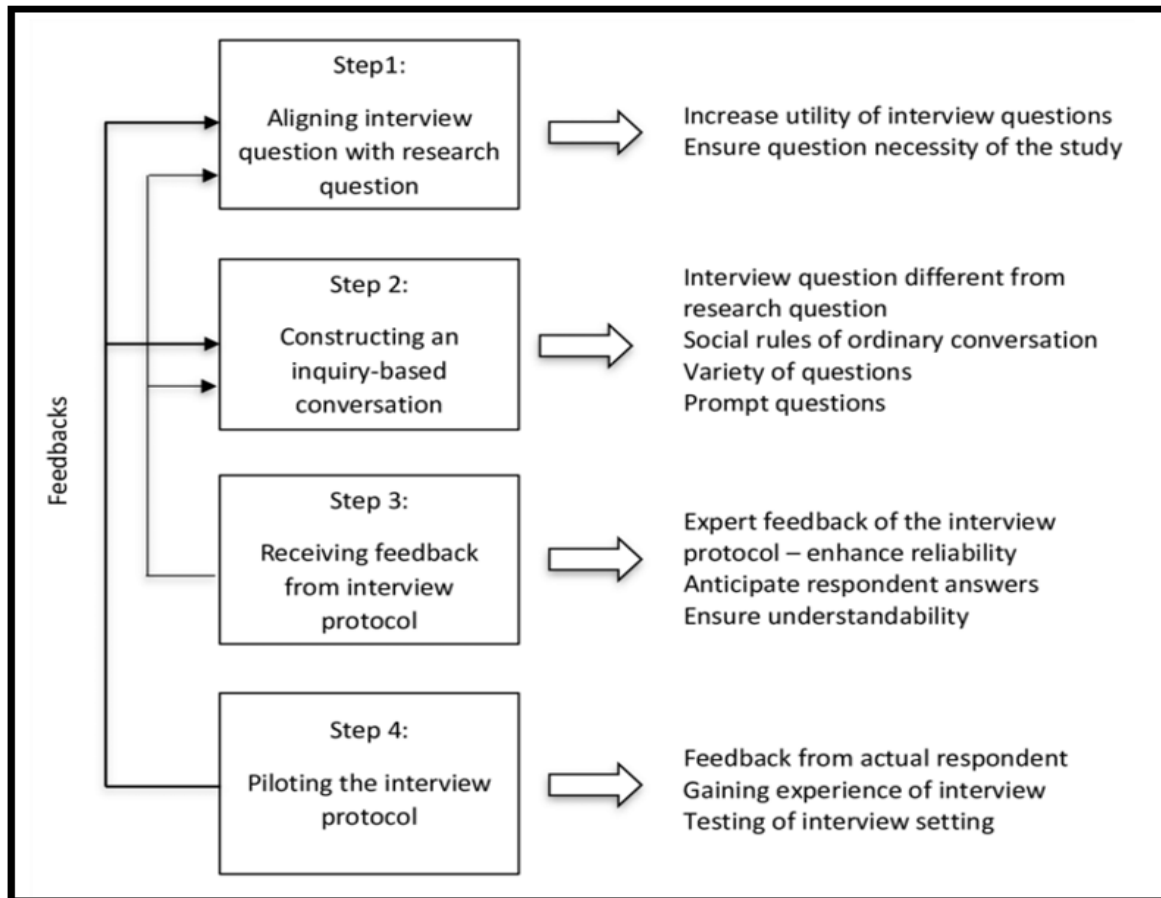


Figure 4.1 The Interview Protocol (Yeong, Ismail, and Hassim, 2018: 2702)

For this study, Figure 4.1 was applied by firstly drafting research objectives from which the researcher formulated the research themes and relevant interview questions. Secondly, interview questions were then re-written so that the interviewers would adequately understand them to provide accurate answers. The researcher used both open and closed questions. Thirdly, the researcher sent interview questions to the supervisors, experts in research and public relations and communication, for feedback. Finally, after editing some questions, the researcher tested them on a sample group of crisis management team members in their car manufacturing company. It is important to note that this company is not Company A, B, C or D researched for this study.

4.4.2 Case Studies

A case study is the study of either single or multiple cases involving in-depth examinations of people or groups. The researcher conducted the study within a bounded setting or context using various documented (secondary) sources such as interviews, written accounts, questionnaires, audio-visual materials, and observations (Haradhan, 2018: 11).

Heale and Twycross (2017: 7) add that this research method allows a researcher to take a complex and broad topic or phenomenon and narrow it down into a research topic narrowed into manageable research questions. Of course, a researcher has to consider several similar cases, but although similar, they remain complex with unique features.

Under such circumstances (Heale and Twycross, 2017: 7), the researcher should evaluate several similar cases to provide stronger and more reliable answers for the research questions instead of examining just one case. Utilising a multiple-case research study results in a more in-depth comprehension of the cases, which can then be grouped and viewed as one entity, referred to as a **quintain**. A quintain thus allows the researcher to examine and compare the similarities and differences of the individual cases. Themes can then arise from the analyses and assertions about the cases as a whole and in the quintain. When determining what is known about the cases to establish a basic understanding to inform the development of research questions, researchers may review existing literature, grey literature, the media, reports, etc. This study focuses on analysing multiple case studies

The multiple case studies found in the literature review will be analysed and reported in chronological order of crises in the various companies- this is data source triangulation. First, it will determine the frequency of crises occurrences and report the actions taken by the organisations with each event. Secondly, the researcher compared results generated from the interviews to those found in published literature. The researcher used the data to inform conclusions and recommendations.

4.5 PILOT TESTING

A pilot test is synonymous with a feasibility study that intends to guide a large-scale investigation. In essence, a pilot study is a risk mitigation strategy to reduce the likelihood of failure in a more significant project. Pilots allow the researcher to experiment and observe how to launch a full-scale project on a small-scale scale. Though a feasibility test is generally burdensome, researchers may realise benefits that outweigh the extra effort, thus increasing the likelihood of success. The results of a pilot study can aid the researcher in identifying definite and probable problems, which can then be addressed before commencing the anticipated larger study (Fraser, Fahlman, Arscott and Guillot, 2018: 263). Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2014: 15) add that a plot study must be conducted to ensure that the right questions are asked in the right way to achieve the interview objectives. This

necessitates a draft questionnaire and must be conducted on one or two participants similar to the chosen or sampled population. The interview must be worded in simple and clear language. Pilot testing can also be utilised to record and ensure that both parties are audible.

For this study, the interview schedule will be the research instrument, and they will be pre-tested amongst a small group of public relations practitioners from another car manufacturing company. This pilot test is an essential step in the research process because it serves to identify any problem areas and deficiencies in the research instrument in preparation for researching with a larger study. The researcher will also become comfortable with the interview procedure and edit questions accordingly where necessary.

4.6 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Hayishi, Abib and Hoppen (2019: 98) emphasise that the reliability and validity of research and its results are vital elements to deliver evidence of the quality of research. These two terms are deemed inseparable by researchers. Validity refers to the confidence with which researchers draw suppositions from an analysis of the study. Reliability is the consistency with which a research procedure will assess a phenomenon in the same way, even over numerous attempts. Furthermore, Foucault (1972) and McKinnon (1988) argue that these terms are essential and relevant about truth in the quality of attained outcomes. Thus objectivity is requisite in the construction of knowledge. Lastly, the trustworthiness of research is considered a central aspect of validity and reliability.

In qualitative research, these two terms are referred to as trustworthiness, which is particularly about credibility, transferability, conformability and dependability. Hayishi, Abib and Hoppen (2019: 98) go on to cite Smith (1983) and Wolcott (1990), who disagreeably state that the validity and reliability criteria ought to be abandoned in qualitative studies as they are more relevant in quantitative, measurable, studies. Trustworthiness (Maree, 2020: 143) is very important in qualitative research as it is the acid test of the data analysis, findings and conclusions. Credibility speaks to the research questions and how believable the findings are. Transferability is about not using generalised claims, but conducting research to make connections between the elements being studied as well as their experiences or research. Careful attention should be given when choosing participants. Dependability demonstrates credibility through the chosen research design and its implementation. Lastly, confirmability is the degree to which the researcher was neutral or

the extent to which the study findings are shaped by the participants and not the researcher's bias or interest.

4.6.1 Reliability

Mandal (2018: 529) declares reliability in qualitative research as dependability where the researcher ensures that information, data collection methods and suitable research decisions are correctly documented. Objectivity when collecting and analysing data is also an important aspect of reliability in qualitative research. It necessitates congruency between two or more independent persons about the information's accuracy, significance, and meaning. In addition, Cypress (2017: 256) denotes that reliability in qualitative research is about consistency and care when applying research practices, ensuring that they reflect in the application of research practices, analysis and conclusions.

The researcher devised the interview questions in a way that their answers achieve the set research objectives. The objectives of this study are to assess the crisis plans at Company A, B firstly, C and D. Secondly, the crisis communication monitoring and evaluation tools and techniques employed at these companies will be assessed. Thirdly, the role of communication during a crisis will be evaluated. Fourthly, challenges faced by the crisis management teams when implementing crisis communication will be identified. The outcomes of the above objectives will inform and assist the researcher in identifying possible gaps and then making recommendations on improving crisis communication and management plans in these companies. The researcher will remain objective at all times so as to attain reliable, accurate and consistent findings.

4.6.2 Validity

In qualitative research, validity has various meanings, such as rigour, trustworthiness, appropriateness, and quality. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative validity is not a watertight product or measurement. Validity thus implies the maintenance of accuracy, quality, and consistency between the research problem, the data provided, and the methods of data collection. In other words, the researcher needs to formulate strong research questions, describe relevant theory comprehensively, select a relevant research design that potentiates the systematic facets of the study, and lengthily describe the process of data collection and analysis. Cypress (2017: 256) augments that validity is about research being well-grounded or justifiable.

The results thus need to be truthful. Therefore, this study critically and objectively analysed crisis communication literature from various (recent) credible authors to ensure validity. Furthermore, the researcher will conduct in-depth interviews with crisis management team members. These teams are particularly relevant because they are the ones who are at the fore of crisis communication in their respective organisations. They play active roles, disseminating timeous messages to internal and external stakeholders regarding the crises in their organisations. They also have to answer to the media and public timeously, explaining how the crises occurred, efforts to suppress them and how the organisation will remedy the situation to avoid future occurrences. The researcher used a dictaphone to record the interviews and replay the responses to record accurate data. The researcher conducted a pilot test to ensure that valid questions were asked, resulting in valid data.

4.6.3 Triangulation

The researcher used triangulation to ensure the reliability and validity (trustworthiness) of the research study. Chako (2017: 2) states that triangulation is the process of applying and combining various research methods in one's research to ascertain a phenomenon. It attempts to map out or fully explain the depth and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint. It encompasses the utilisation of various data sources in a study to generate understanding.

Data sources can be primary or secondary and utilised simultaneously. Therefore, researchers use two types of triangulation, namely: theory triangulation and data triangulation.

4.6.3.1 Theory triangulation

Theory triangulation occurs when the researcher uses a variety of theories to inform their study and collects data accordingly (Chako, 2017: 5). The theories used in this study are the Systems Theory, Chaos Theory, and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The Systems Theory is the key theory from which the others have their roots. The way in which the car manufacturing companies reacted when faced with conflict underpins the importance of these theories.

4.6.3.2 Data triangulation

Data triangulation occurs when the researcher uses different sources of information to increase the validity of the study. Here, the consistency of data from various sources is cross-checked. In essence, triangulation is a solution to providing valid and reliable data

in this complex inquiry system. Triangulation strengthens the qualitative research approach and empowers it (Chako, 2017: 6). Agreeably, Heale and Twycross (2017: 8) concur that the objective of triangulation is to increase confidence in the research finding by confirming a proposition using two or more independent measures. Combining such findings provides a more comprehensive illustration of the results as opposed to using a single approach.

Both primary and secondary source triangulation are used in this study as multiple theories are used to understand crisis communication and crisis management. Primary and secondary sources are also used to derive data for the researcher further. The information is then cross-examined to identify similarities and contrasts in the form of themes and strengthen the validity and reliability of the study.

4.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Archer (2018: 2) explains that data analysis refers to the tools used by the researcher to make sense of the enormous volumes of collected data so that the information can be presented systematically to the readers. Qualitative data analysis occurs when the researcher summarises, describes, and analyses this chunky load of data with the main aim of seeking relationships and scrutinising themes or patterns, discrepancies as well as any existing links. The data in qualitative research is non-numerical and presented in the form of texts, graphics and audio. Excellence in qualitative data analysis necessitates the researcher to constantly keep the audience and the final product, which seeks to answer the research questions, in mind.

The audience requires the researcher to present masses of unstructured data logically, permitting the reader to come to terms with the phenomena speedily and meaningfully cross-examine the researcher's analysis and interpretation. Ibrahim (2015: 99) further explains that once a researcher has successfully collected accurate and reliable data, the next step is to extract the pertinent and helpful information buried to interpret the data further.

This study employs thematic analysis as a data analysis tool which Herzog, Handke and Hitters (2019: 4) refer to as the cornerstone of qualitative research examination. In thematic analysis, the researcher establishes what research participants (such as authors and interviewees) deem essential, how participants categorise experiences and perceptions, what correlated attitudes they possess and how various categories are

associated with each other. The researcher develops and applies modes of classification and interpretation that aid when deducing non-obvious and credible connotations from complex data. The researcher did this by identifying codes or frequently used terms, then themes or statements or phrases and lastly, patterns in the data acquired. The researcher used thematic analysis to analyse a vast amount of qualitative data derived from interviews, media articles, social media, focus groups, and other text forms. Archer (2018: 3) elaborates that a reader attempting to make sense of the phenomenon under investigation can easily and quickly make sense of the overall phenomenon by simply reading the themes.

This study employs thematic analysis as content obtained from various primary and secondary sources will be critically analysed and interpreted to provide accurate conclusions and recommendations. Qualitative research requires excellent comprehension and data collection from diverse sources. The themes under which patterns will be compared and contrasted in the various organisations are the crisis management plans, the role of communication in a crisis and crisis communication role players; monitoring and evaluation of communication tools and techniques; and constraints in crisis communication implementation. These themes are linked to the research objectives and are divided accordingly in the interview schedule, where relevant questions are asked under each theme. NVivo was used to further analyse the information according to the predetermined themes. The next figure shows the constantly used words and phrases by the participants, which formed the predetermined themes of the research.

Word Cloud



Figure 4.2 Word Cloud

Figure 4.2 is a word cloud generated from the interviewees' responses regarding their organisations' crisis communication and management. Jin (2017: 788) highlights that word clouds are weighted lists that visualise language or data. The more frequently a word is used, the bigger it becomes on the word cloud. For example, the keywords or frequently used terms are crisis, social media, public, communication, reputation, spokesperson and public from the above word cloud. The researcher formulated the word cloud using NVivo (Kent State University, 2021: 1), a software program used in qualitative or mixed-method research to analyse unstructured data such as texts, including interviews, surveys and social media.

4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Mishra and Alok (2017: 1) highlight the importance of the interviewer to seek written and informed consent from participants of the study. These consent letters should be obtained after the researcher writes a letter requesting consent from participants. Such letters need to clarify why the study is essential and explain that participation is entirely voluntary. Furthermore, the researcher ought to assure the participants that their confidentiality and anonymity are of utmost importance. Thus, the researcher did not reveal their identities.

Before conducting interviews, the researcher will seek ethical clearance from the Durban University of Technology, which assesses, amongst other requirements, fairness and

honesty regarding the researcher's research instruments and methodology, the topic of study, and the orientation of the research. Additionally, the researcher conducted a pilot test with the interview questions to ask ethical questions. Here, interviewers were expected to answer questions honestly and provide any concerns or uncertainties about the questions to be revised where applicable. Furthermore, all sources used were acknowledged in Harvard referencing as plagiarism is a severe offence.

Before the participants signed the letters of consent, the researcher submitted a letter containing a summary of the research, including information about the researcher. The information includes the researcher's qualifications, supervisors, procedures to obtain data, and any possible risks or discomfort (there are none projected for this research). The researcher also highlighted the benefits of the research and contact information for the participant to use should they have any questions or concerns. The researcher informed participants that participating in the study would be voluntary. The research also stated that anonymity of participants will be upheld as their names and that of the company will not be mentioned. It will increase the researcher's trustworthiness to have confidence in the researcher and therefore provide truthful information.

4.9 DELIMITATIONS

Delimitations are those study limitations consciously set by the researcher. These are thus boundaries or limits defined by the researcher to achieve the study's aims and objectives and ensure that they are possible to attain. Delimitations are, therefore, in the control of the researcher and mainly focus on the study's theoretical background, objectives, research questions, variables under investigation, and the study sample (Theofanidis and Fountouki, 2018: 157).

The researcher narrowed the scope of the study to the participants being members of the crisis management teams at certain car manufacturing companies and situated in Gauteng at the companies' head offices where crisis management policies and procedures are primarily implemented. The research data collection method is a questionnaire for in-depth focus interviews. It thus comprises open questions. However, there are a few closed questions.

4.10 LIMITATIONS

According to Ross and Zaidi (2019: 261), all research studies have limitations, which are weaknesses or shortcomings within the research that can influence the outcomes and conclusions of the study. According to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018: 156), these weaknesses are commonly out of the researcher's control or imposed restrictions. The fact that limitations may affect the study requires the researcher to acknowledge them for the sake of credibility.

The study focuses on selected car manufacturing companies. It, therefore, cannot be generalised as the study aims to assess planning and management of crisis communication specifically in the car manufacturing industry and especially at the organisations' head offices. Possible constraints include some participants not responding truthfully or pulling out of the voluntary answering of questions. As a result, it could distort the findings, conclusions and consequently the recommendations. Another constraint was the researcher's inability to travel from Durban to Gauteng to conduct face-to-face interviews.

4.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the research methodology used in the research design, target population, data collection methods. The chapter has also highlighted how the researcher analysed the data and the study's reliability and validity. Therefore, this study used the research methodology to collect data on the significant rise in the number of South African motor manufacturing companies who have recalled some of their car models due to technical malfunctions that could catch fire. The next chapter will analyse and interpret the data collected.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS: RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the researcher discussed the methodology employed in this study. In addition, the researcher exhaustively addressed the study's research design, target population, and data collection methods. In this chapter, the researcher analysed and interpreted data collected from the interview questions and case studies of four companies through thematic analysis and NVivo. First, the researcher identified frequently used terms, phrases, or themes and patterns in the participants' answers. The researcher also analysed the themes against the information in the literature review — the thematic analysis allowed for critical analysis and interpretation of data that provided accurate conclusions and recommendations.

5.2 THE VALUE OF DATA ANALYSIS

The value of data analysis lies in its purpose of extracting useful information from data and making decisions based on data analysis. It is a process where the researcher collects, models, and scrutinises to obtain imperative insights for decision-making. Thus, data analysis is vital for the growth and success of businesses (Johnson, 2021: 1). According to Archer (2018: 2), the fundamental principle of qualitative data analysis is summarising, describing, and analysing masses of data with the critical goal of seeking relationships and examining themes or patterns. Qualitative data analysis thus acknowledges that humans find it challenging to relate to enormous quantities of unstructured data, necessitating the need to bring some order to the chaos. Therefore, it applies to both the researcher and the eventual consumers of the research.

For this study, the interviewer used an interview schedule to collect data and later narrowed the information down to answer the study's objectives. The researcher divided the interview schedule used for data collection into four sections which explored the following predetermined themes:

Section A- Crisis Management and the Crisis Management Plan

Section B- The Role of Communication and Role Players

Section C- Communication Tools and Techniques

Section D- Constraints in Crisis Communication Implementation

5.3 SECTION A: CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

5.3.1 The role of public relations in crisis management

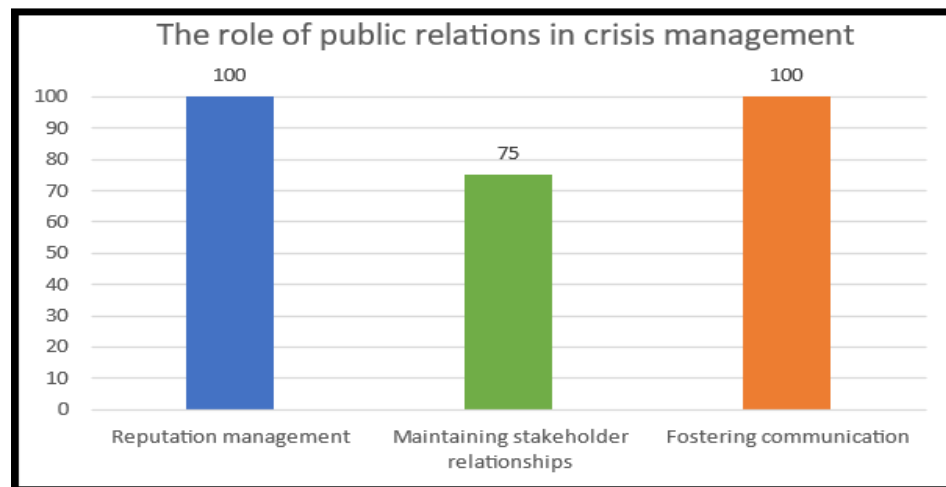


Figure 5.1 The role of public relations in crisis management

All the participants (100%) highlighted that public relations are vital in playing a dual role of reputation management and fostering communication, while 75% of the participants added that maintaining stakeholder relationships is also a vital role of public relations.

It confirms what Theaker (2016: 6), Ngondo (2019: 5) and Jonker (2018: 11) highlight as the critical roles of public relations during crisis management- managing the organisation's reputation, forming a link between the organisation and the stakeholders as well as crisis communication. It is worth noting that 25% of the participants did not mention the critical role of public relations in two-way communication between the organisation and their stakeholders. During a crisis like car malfunctions which usually leads to recalls, it is of utmost importance that both internal and external stakeholders are alerted urgently for the recall process to take place seamlessly as well as for the organisation to maintain its good reputation.

5.3.2 What the company deems as a crisis

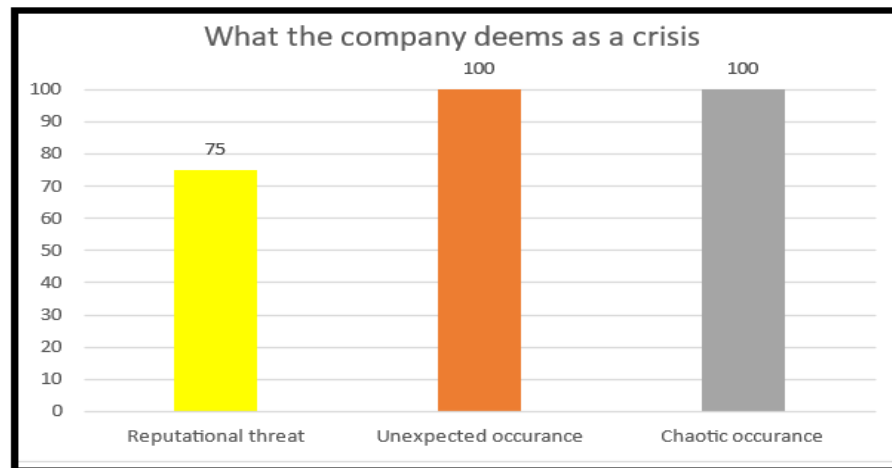


Figure 5.2 What the company deems as a crisis

Figure 5.2 shows that organisations view crises as the most unexpected occurrences that are chaotic. They further see it as occurrences that pose threats to the organisation's reputation. Figure 5.2 shows that 75% of the participants described crisis situations as occurrences that pose threats to the organisation's reputation while all the participants agreed that a crisis happens unexpectedly and is chaotic in nature.

These answers, therefore, concur with Olawale (2014: 81) and Marketing91's (2017: 1) conviction of a crisis. These authors stress that crises necessitate timely and effective decision-making to induce severe reputational damage consequences. A reputational threat can translate to organisational failure. Ashari, Abang Ahmed, and Samani (2017: 1) also agree that a crisis could implicate an organisation in ways that could lead to economic and reputational challenges. A crisis such as car recalls due to technical errors is thus an occurrence which leads to instability and hazardous situations and affects a community, a group of people or society as a whole. There is an element of surprise when a crisis occurs, and crises often happens at a short notice and triggers fear and threat which result in a sequence of unexpected events. A crisis therefore creates a situation in which time is short, yet a quick and effective decision needs to be taken. The participants did not mention that a crisis can lead to instability. The possibility of a car bursting into flames while inside it definitely triggers fear.

5.3.3 Type/s of crises the organisation has faced



Figure 5.3 Crisis categories experienced by organisations

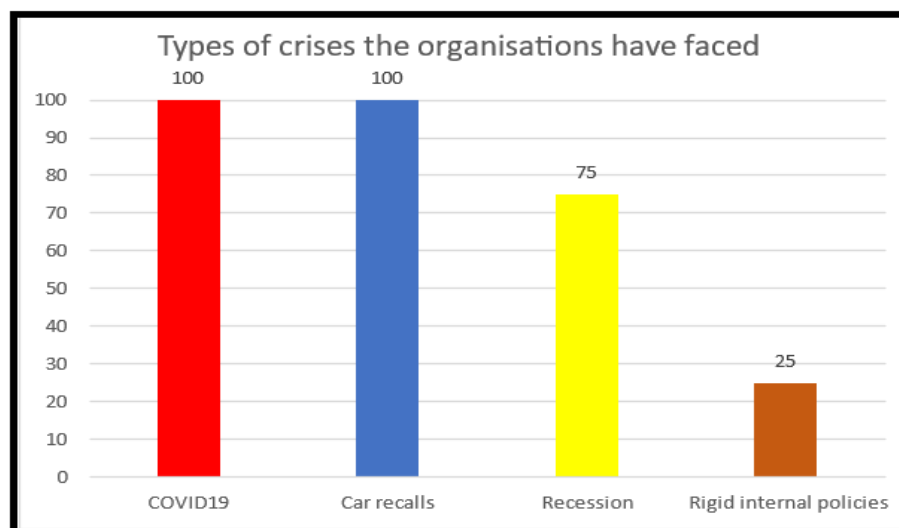


Figure 5.4 Types of crises the organisations have faced

Alshammari et al. (2016: 1) agree with Galacgac and Singh (2016: 1) that all organisations, as complex systems, are prone to chaos. Indeed, all the participants said their organisations had experienced four out of four (100%) crises. In other words, all four car manufacturing companies have faced an immediate crisis, an emerging crisis, a sustained crisis and a social-mediated crisis as seen in Figure 5.3.

As seen in Figure 5.4, all the participants (100%) explained that one of their biggest crisis challenges was COVID19 which "*halted all business proceedings*". This means that no money was coming into the business, which lead to many employees losing their jobs and many clients losing their cars. All participants (100%) affirmed that car recalls came

second as a crisis that affected car manufacturing companies. The recalling of cars means that instead of working on new products and bringing in more profits for the organisation, the mechanics have to re-work on already manufactured cars at no cost to the consumer. This translates to working backwards, and thus less profit for the car manufacturing industry. Faulty cars also put the company in a compromising situation where their integrity is questioned by stakeholders.

Twenty-five per cent of the participants also mentioned rigid internal policies while 75% of the participants mentioned recession as some of the crises experienced in the organisations they work for. These crisis challenges prove that car manufacturing companies are open systems that are affected by their external environments. The internal policies of crisis communication indicate that only the crisis management team leader or spokesperson can communicate with the media, which means that should any other employee be approached by the media, they need to say “*No comment*” which the media can then spin and say the company is hiding something and is thus not open and honest. Recession resulted in less people buying cars and some even returning their cars to the dealerships as they could no longer afford them.

5.3.4 Crisis management (or prevention) plans in place for the different crises



Figure 5.5 Crisis management plans

Figure 5.5 indicates that the most prominent crisis management or prevention plans at the chosen car manufacturing organisations are risk management, issues management and crisis communication. Thereafter, contingency planning and public opinion assessment

are secondary crisis management plans. The majority of the participants (75%) in Figure 5.5 said their organisations have all the following crisis management or prevention plans in place for different crises:

- *Risk Management*
- *Issues Management*
- *Contingency Planning*
- *Environmental Scanning*
- *Crisis Communication*

On the other hand, 25% of the participants only mentioned three of the five plans, namely “...*risk management, issues management and crisis communication*”.

Thus, all participants agree with Blokhina (2020: 13) and Quadros’ (2020: 1) that the main elements of crisis management are detection and mitigation, with effective crisis communication being the essential part of crisis management’s responsibilities. Martínez, Mejías, Quintas and Pardo (2012: 596) also state that proactive crisis management requires risk, issues, and contingency planning. Effectively implementing these three steps assists organisations to avoid a crisis from arising, thus efficiently managing it at its early stages before reputational damage occurs.

Zamoum and Gorpe (2018: 209) stress that an uncontrolled issue can turn into a crisis. Thus, practical issues management lessens the probability of an organisation facing a crisis. Therefore, issues and crises have a reciprocal relationship as an issue can create a crisis as much as a crisis can create an issue. Where car defaults are concerned, car manufacturing companies are supposed to test cars thoroughly, which is aimed at early detection of any possible risks and issues before they develop into a crisis.

5.3.5 members of the crisis management team (job titles)



Figure 5.6 Members of the crisis management team

According to Figure 5.6, 100% of the participants listed the following people who make up their crisis management team:

- *Leader*
- *Finance and Administration*
- *Human Resource Management*
- *Information Technology*
- *Marketing and Communications*

From Long's (2019: 1) recommendation, the following personnel were not mentioned by the participants although they should also be included in a crisis management team:

- General Administrative Support
- Legal Representation
- Operations and Business Recovery
- Project Management
- Risk, Security and Compliance
- Facility Support

Although participants did not list all the personnel mentioned by Long (2019: 1), it is evident that the relevant departments' staff members (according to the companies) are present

and take on the other roles listed as individual personnel by Long. It is in line with Fontanella (2019: 1), who stresses that having a crisis management team with representatives from different departments is a great way to prepare for various crises proactively. It is highly likely that each member of the team plays multiple roles, for example the Human Resources representative can also be a legal representative. This means that the team is inundated with many responsibilities and require further assistance from other staff members. In the instance where one person died when their car burst into flames with them inside, a legal guru is required, who will direct all their attention to advising the organisation on the legal implications of such a crisis.

5.3.6 Role/s played by each member of the crisis management team

All participants agreed that the main roles that each crisis management team member plays can be summarised as follows:

- Minimizing Impact
- [Monitoring] Early Warning Signs
- Employee Motivation
- Timeous Business Operations Resumption
- Constant Communication
- Advisory
- Strategizing

Concurring, Juneja (2019: 1) mentions the above as mandatory roles that crisis managers must play. A team leader who will take immediate charge of the situation also needs to be appointed. Rouse (2018: 1) also explains that the CMT should provide clear and accurate direction and provide resources for more information, and calm people's fears where necessary. Even when there is not much information available yet, crisis communication is still vital, and it must reassure people that the organisation is working on a solution. For instance, when more than five people complain about the same error in a car, the organisation should see this as a red flag and take immediate action by alerting the consumers even when they are still investigating the matter.

5.4 SECTION B: THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION AND ROLE PLAYERS

5.4.1 The primary objective of internal communication

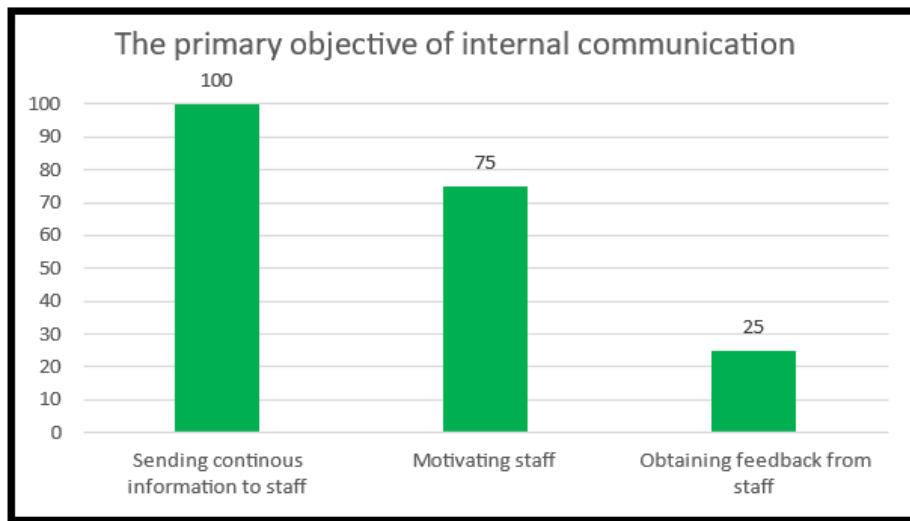


Figure 5.7 The primary objective of internal communication

In Figure 5.7, 100% of the participants said the primary objective of internal communication is to disseminate important information to internal stakeholders. 75% of the participants then also highlighted the importance of keeping employees motivated through internal communication, with one participant stressing that “...it is critical to ensure that you are aiming at engaging and inspiring your people with internal messages too.” Thus, the key objectives can be summarised as follows:

- Disseminating important information
- Motivating [employees]
- Obtaining feedback from staff

It is in line with Rouse (2018: 1) and Ispact Guru's (2016: 1), who highlight the importance of employees in any organisation as they are the backbone of an organisation. It is essential for employees to stay motivated and inspired to cultivate productivity and staff retention. Staff feedback is vital as they are the first ones to know when certain cars have defects, the clients bring the cars to them for assistance. It is therefore imperative that car manufacturing organisations prioritise obtaining feedback from their staff, instead of merely prioritising sending the staff information.

5.4.2 The primary objective of external communication

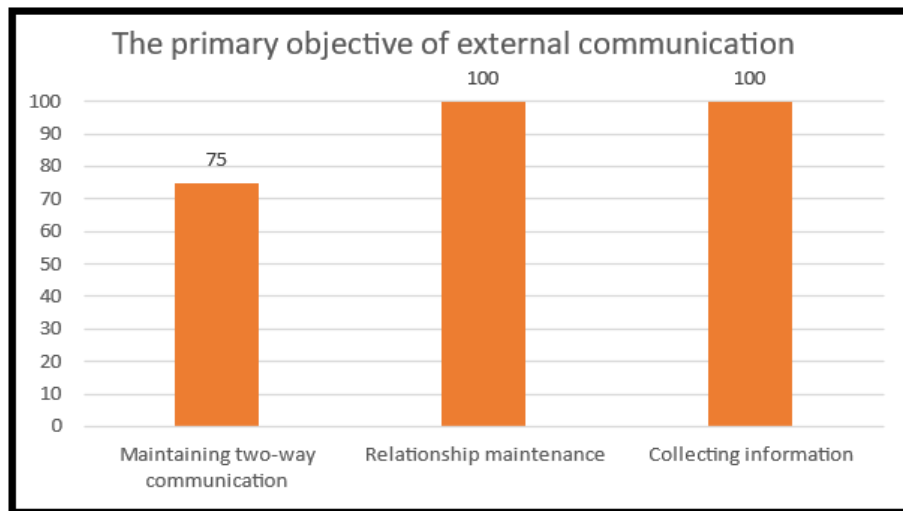


Figure 5.8 The primary objective of external communication

Figure 5.8 shows that obtaining information from external stakeholders and relationship maintenance are the most essential objectives of external communication. All the participants (100%) in Figure 5.8 agreed that it is “*to collect information from outside the organisation*” and went on to say “*every organisation must maintain a relationship with the common the general public*”, while 75% added that “*external communication helps to keep a link between the organisation and society.*”

From these responses, and concurring with Ngondo (2019: 6), the primary objectives of external communication are as follows:

- Linking the organisation with the general public
- Maintaining Relationships
- Collecting Information

Ngondo (2019: 6) further adds that organisations should consider embracing social and digital media as a link for effective reciprocal communication to maintain a relationship with the general public. Agreeably, Keller (2016: 629) highlights that a wise organisation takes concrete steps to manage fruitful relations with its vital public. The author adds that most organisations have a public relations department that monitors the attitudes and opinions of their publics and distributes information and communications to build goodwill, thus promoting and protecting the organisation’s image.

Organisations seem to value external feedback more than internal feedback (as seen in Figure 5.7) which may cause more issues for the organisations. In the case of a car default,

as mentioned before, a client will go to the dealership and explain their car issues to the staff as a first point of contact. Even though dealerships follow up with questionnaires, many people do not pay attention to those recovery phase questions as they have already spoken to the car manufacturing company's staff members.

5.4.3 Stage/s of the crisis at which the crisis is communicated to internal stakeholders

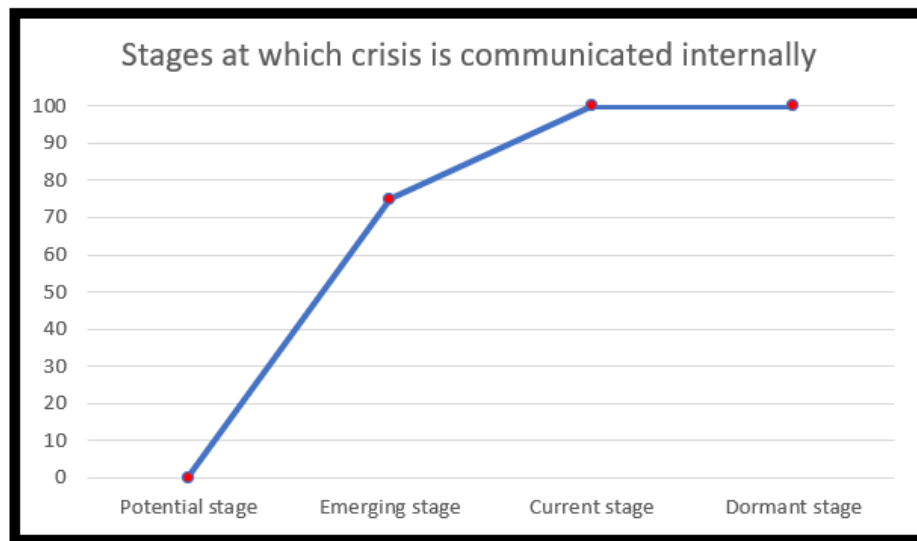


Figure 5.9 Stages at which crisis is communicated internally

Figure 5.9 shows that none of the companies communicates internally about the crisis at its potential stage. 75% of the companies begin communicating about the crisis when it emerges. All the companies (100%) communicate with their internal stakeholders while the crisis occurs and at the dormant stage.

Thus 75% of the companies start communicating internally about a crisis as it emerges, as per Kadarova, Markovič and Mihok's (2017: 61) suggestion. It may be a problem that 25% of the organisations only start communicating about the crisis at its current stage and not as it emerges. Employees play a vital role in combating crises and require as much information and time as possible. Rouse (2018: 1) emphasises that when a crisis occurs, proactive, rapid, and comprehensive communication is imperative. Thus, an organisation should have a crisis communication plan that establishes a framework for disseminating information to all stakeholders affected by the situation.

5.4.4 Stage/s of the crisis at which the crisis is communicated to external stakeholders

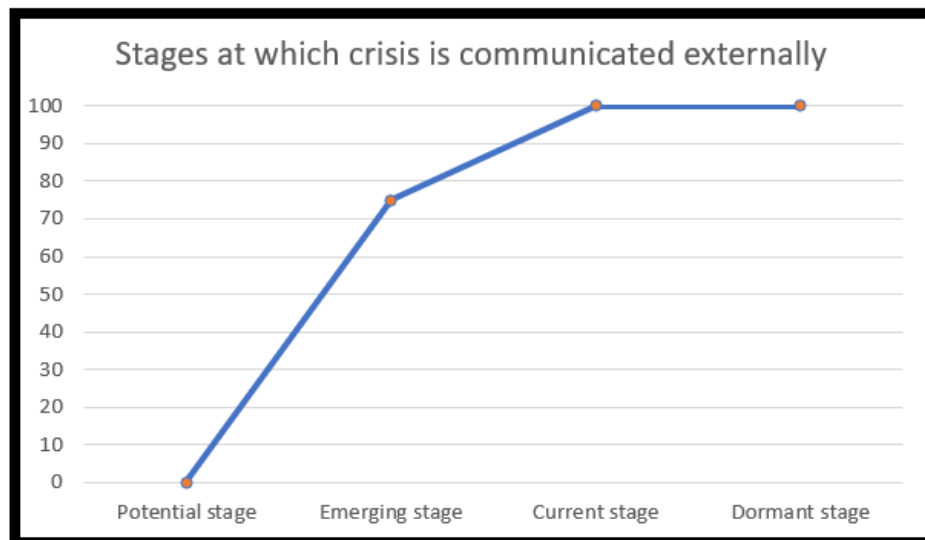


Figure 5.10 Stages at which crisis is communicated externally

Figure 5.10 shows that, just as with Figure 5.9, the crisis is not communicated to external stakeholders at its potential stage. Once again, 75% of the companies start communicating the crisis when it emerges, and (100%) all companies communicate or continue communicating as it develops and at the dormant stage.

It is in line with Bernstein (n.d.), who recommends that organisations communicate by releasing an immediate statement about the crisis instead of only communicating once it has fully developed. Furthermore, the view is in tandem with Kadarova, Markovič and Mihok (2017: 62), who advise that organisations should state what has been done to end the crisis during the crisis remedy the situation. Thus 25% of the organisations do not comply with these requirements as they only start their crisis communication to external stakeholders at the current crisis stage. This is bad practise as this means that reactive crisis management is employed, meaning that the crisis is allowed to develop further before it is addressed. In the car manufacturing industry, this translates to putting people's lives in danger as cars are dangerous machines to operate and any possible defect necessitates immediate communication and action.

5.4.5 Mediums used to disseminate information internally in the event of a crisis

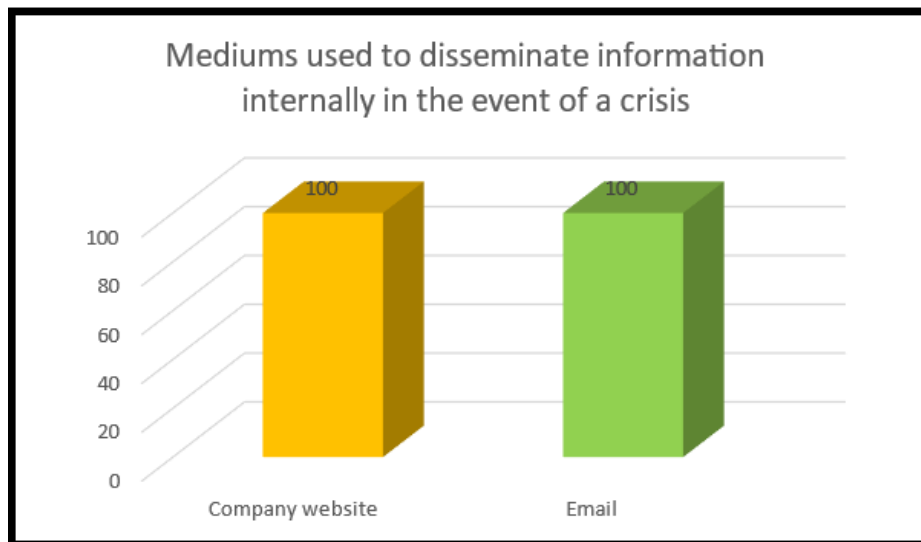


Figure 5.11 Mediums used to disseminate information internally in the event of a crisis

All organisations (100%) said they use emails and company websites equally to disseminate information to internal stakeholders in times of crisis. Figure 5.11, therefore, shows that emails and company websites are equally imperative for internal crisis communication, thus proving Stephens and Malone's (2016: 381) belief that organisational websites help keep various stakeholders updated during a crisis. Alternatively, or in addition, emails reach the relevant internal stakeholders fast and thus deliver the intended message timeously. Harrington (n.d.) adds that, in terms of releasing statements, a proactive release is one made immediately available and could be in the form of a press conference or posting the message on the organisation's website (or social media platforms).

According to the participants, all the car manufacturing companies have a database of their employees' email addresses, which they use along with websites, to constantly communicate with their employees. Emails make sense as any information about a potential crisis reaches the intended recipient immediately as not all employees check the company website regularly. Employees will know, for example, which cars have defects and what exactly the defect is immediately.

5.4.6 Mediums used to disseminate information externally in the event of a crisis

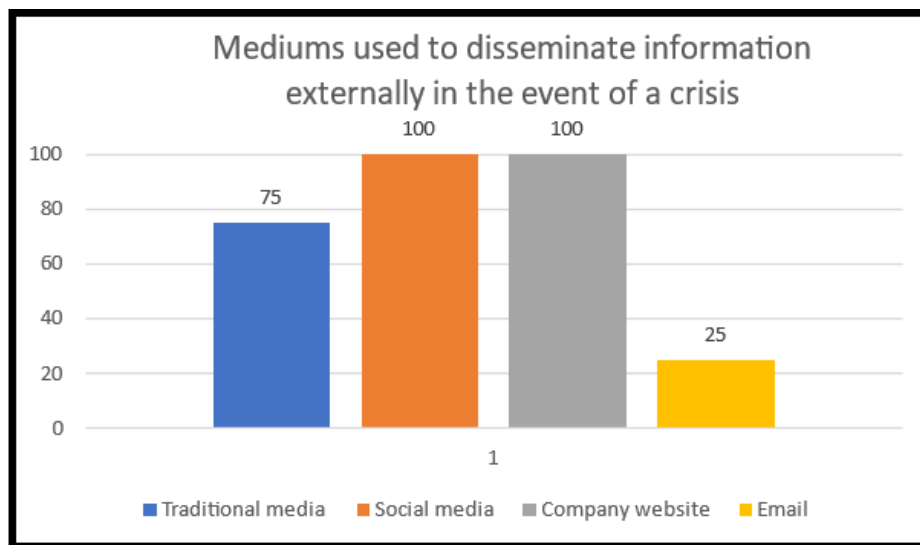


Figure 5.12 Mediums used to disseminate information externally in the event of a crisis

In Figure 5.12, 75% of the participants stated that their organisations use traditional media to disseminate information externally, 100% of the participants said their organisations use both social media and company websites and only 25% of the participants said their organisations use emails as a form of communication.

The responses thus agree with Murdock (2010) in Austin and Jin (2017: 165), who stresses that publics with high involvement in crises are highly likely to utilise traditional media channels such as newspapers and magazines when retrieving and processing news and crisis information. The results also show that Valentini, Romenti and Kruckeberg (2018: 58) were correct in saying that there is a growing consensus that new or social media are changing crisis dynamics by speeding up the development of critical situations, potentially forming new types of crises. It is attributed to social media enabling the rapid sharing of information on an enormously unimaginable scale in real-time.

People use social media to seek updated information regarding critical situations, such as car recalls or car defects, to share experiences and to get emotional support. It is important to note that false information can also spread fast on social media, which necessitates the need for rapid and continuous responses from companies.

5.5 SECTION C: MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

5.5.1 How outgoing messages are monitored within the organization

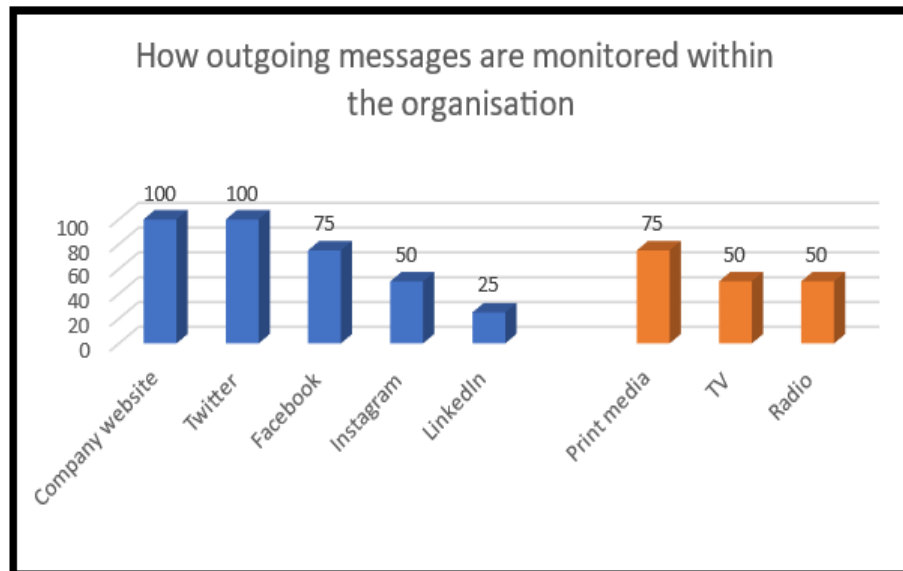


Figure 5.13 How outgoing messages are monitored within the organisation

Figure 5.13 illustrates that all companies utilise their websites, as well as social media- especially Twitter- to monitor outgoing messages. Print media is also monitored by 75% of the companies. Instagram, TV and radio are only monitored by 50% of the companies, while a mere 25% of the organisations monitor LinkedIn.

Once again, Austin and Jin (2017: 165) maintain that the publics with high involvement in crises are highly likely to utilise active media channels such as newspapers and magazines when retrieving and processing news and crisis information. Austin and Jin (2017: 166) conclude that social media can enable sharing of information, sharing of opinions, and expressing of emotions regarding crises in ways that spread far beyond those of traditional public relations communication tactics, such as press releases or public statements.

In a world full of false information, especially in the face of a crisis as serious as car defects and recalls, traditional media is trusted a lot to provide accurate information. The company website is also vital as it provides information that comes directly from the car manufacturing organisation. This information can include a link for clients to book their cars in for recalls, avoiding long queues.

5.5.2 How incoming messages are monitored

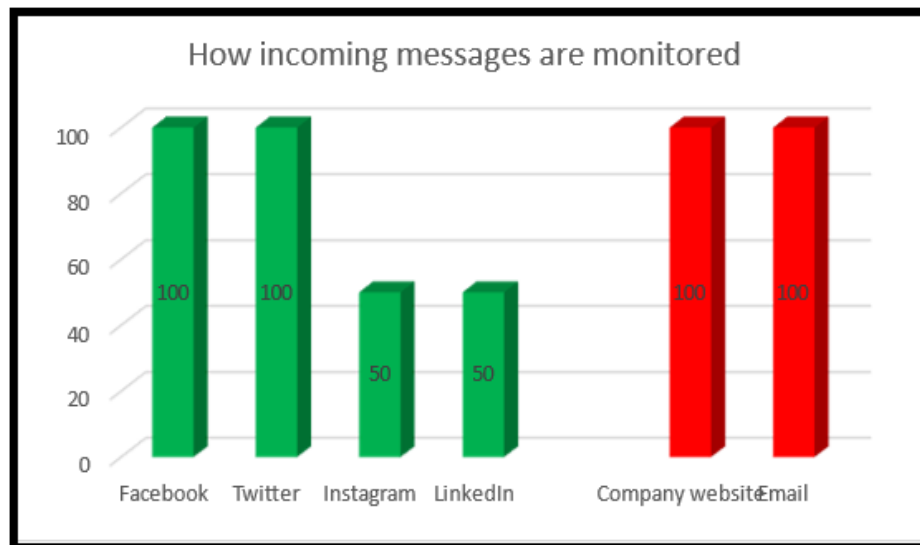


Figure 5.14 How incoming messages are monitored

Harmonious with Austin and Jin (2017: 166), Figure 5.14 shows that various social media platforms are monitored the most to determine what the public is addressing to the companies. Emails and company websites are also monitored as the messages go directly to the organisation. One participant added that “...*some people choose to use the direct messaging options that are available on social media*”. Twitter and Facebook were in the lead as all companies use them where social media is concerned.

The participants also prove Jonker’s (2018: 2) conviction that due to media being drawn to crises and reaching a wide array of publics quickly, it is logical for media relations as a critical component of crisis management. When recalls are announced, clients tend to go to the car manufacturing company’s website and social media pages to verify the information they have received. Some clients even send emails to the organisation for clarity and to voice their opinions.

5.5.3 How external messages about the organisation and the crisis are monitored

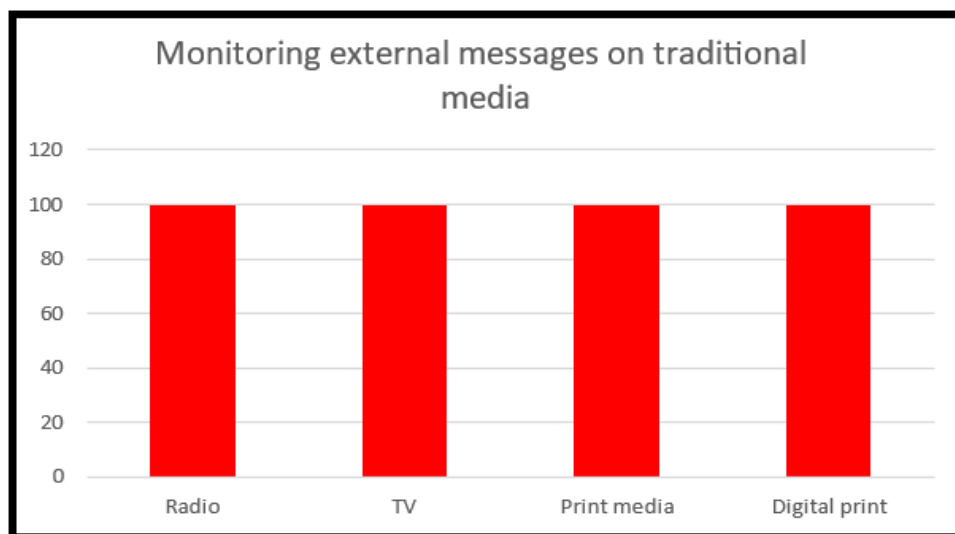


Figure 5.15 Monitoring external messages on traditional media

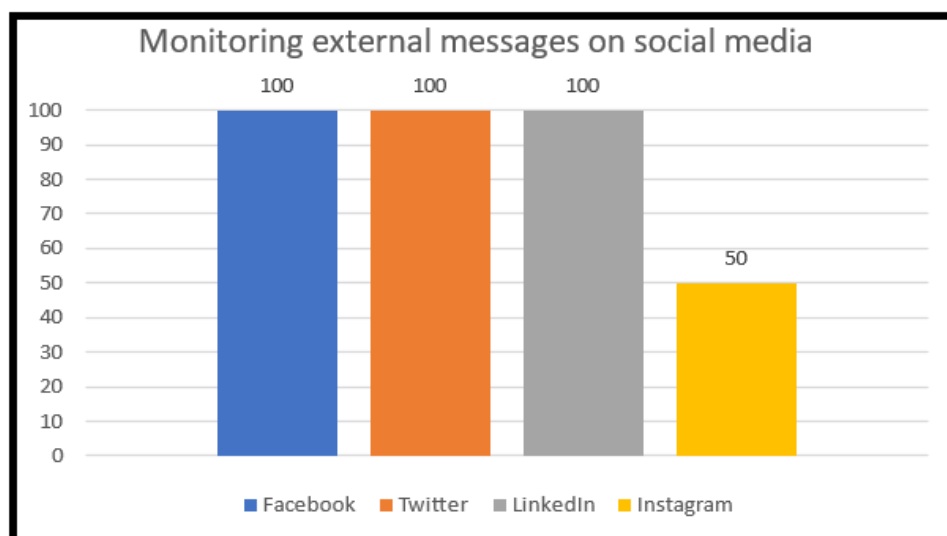


Figure 5.16 Monitoring external messages on social media

An interesting observation in Figure 5.15 was that, especially in crises, all organisations monitor traditional media- namely, radio, TV and print media equally. Digital print is also monitored equally by the companies.

All organisations also monitor social media equally, namely, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn (as seen in Figure 5.16). However, only 50% of the companies monitor Instagram.

Although traditional media also disseminates information, the results favour Austin and Jin (2018: 60), who recommend that, during risk assessment, online issues should take priority, based on the probability of their occurrence and possible impact on the

organisation. Figure 5.16, just as with Figure 5.14, shows that social media platforms are imperative for the organisation to find out what the public is saying about them. Hung-Baesecke and Bowen (2018: 74) posit that during a crisis, the publics, affected stakeholders, and the media are eager to attribute accountability. Like influential social media creators, opinion leaders share and broadcast information about crises to their followers and, indirectly, to the inactive publics online and offline. These followers then also share their opinions and experiences in response.

5.5.4 Systems or tools used in evaluating (the effectiveness of) outgoing messages

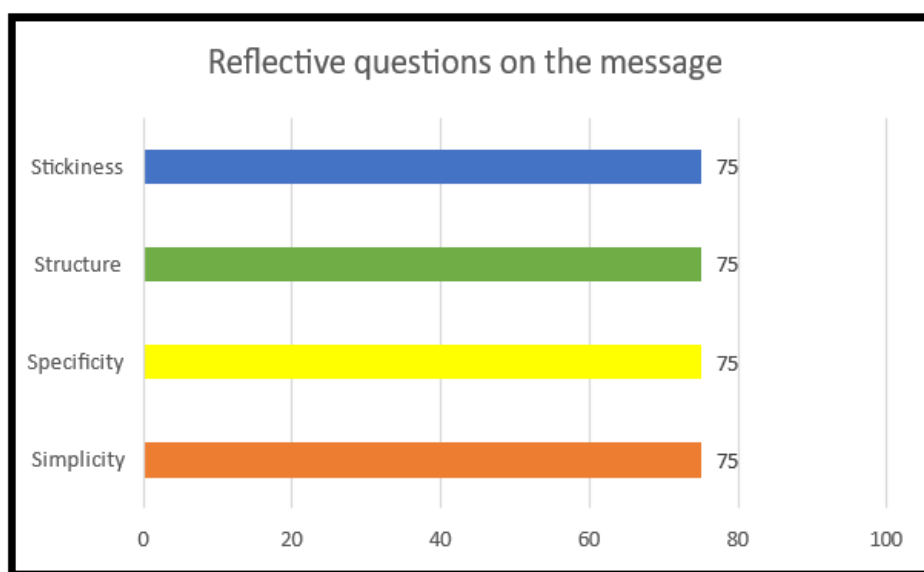


Figure 5.17 Reflective Questions on the Message

All (100%) of the participants were aware that specific reflective questions are asked to evaluate outgoing messages; however, 25% were not sure what the actual questions were about. Figure 5.17 shows that the evaluative questions are asked regarding the simplicity, specificity, structure and stickiness of the message. One participant emphasised that *"We ask reflective questions regarding the message's simplicity, specificity, structure and stickiness,"* and another participant added that *"Monitoring how the public responds, guides us in this process"*.

The above responses are per Rouse (2018: 1), who stresses that reciprocal communication is of utmost importance during the crisis communication evaluation phase. The organisation must evaluate and assess how its response went and areas of possible improvement. As an ongoing process, crisis communication necessitates back and forth communication between the organisation and its stakeholders. The organisation needs to

know how effective the crisis communication messages were in order to improve them; the stakeholders also need constant crisis communication from the organisation. The stakeholders need to let the organisation know if there is an issue with their cars, the organisation must communicate that the car must be brought in for repairs, the client must then give feedback on whether the defect was fixed and so on.

5.5.5 Systems or tools used to evaluate incoming messages

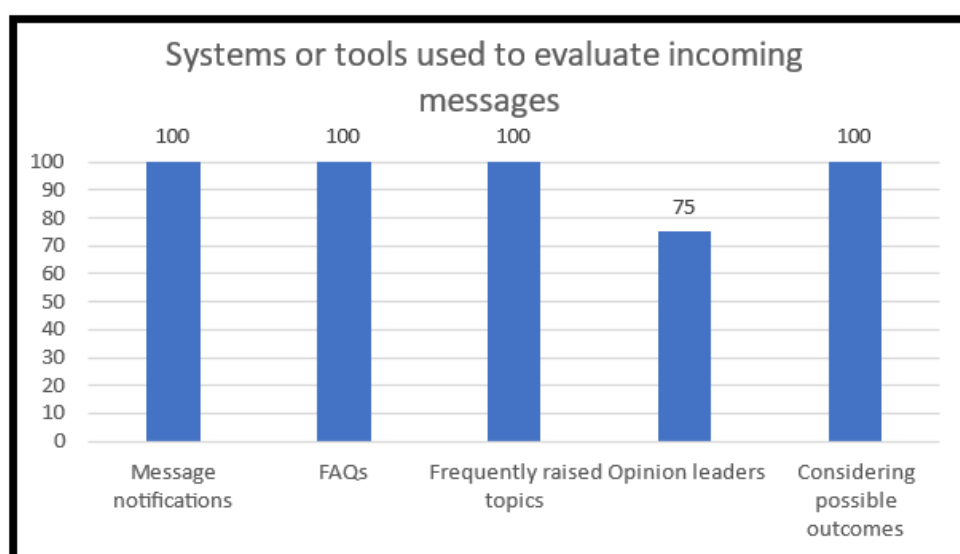


Figure 5.18 Systems or tools used to evaluate incoming messages

All (100%) of the participants in Figure 5.18 agreed that firstly, “*ensuring that there are notifications whenever a message is received*” [on social media platforms or via email] is essential. After that, all participants again agreed that “*frequently asked questions or topics raised are given high importance*”, with most participants (75%) adding “*especially from opinion leaders*”. Finally, all participants also concluded that they considered “*possible outcomes*” of each topic or issue raised when ranking matters.

Figure 5.18 thus points out that when evaluating incoming messages, setting message notifications, monitoring frequently asked questions (FAQs), monitoring raised and evaluating possible outcomes has the same priority. After that, monitoring opinion leaders’ content is essential.

These responses align with Austin and Jin (2018: 60), who stress that, during risk assessment, online issues should take priority based on the probability of their occurrence and possible impact on the organisation. It was on social media, for example, where most people learned of car recalls and car defects of various car manufacturing companies.

5.6 SECTION D: CONSTRAINTS IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION IMPLEMENTATION

5.6.1 Internal stakeholders whom individuals are accountable to in times of crises

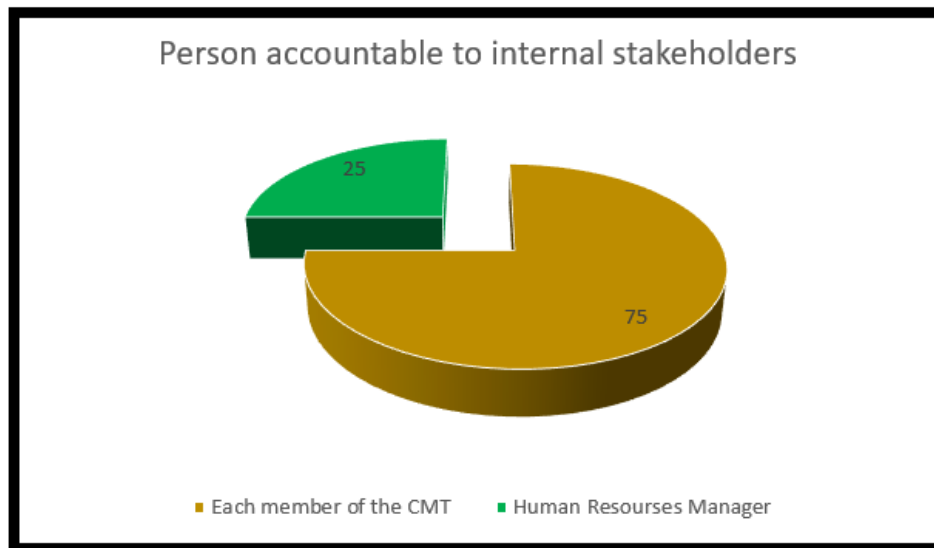


Figure 5.19 Person Accountable to Internal Stakeholders

Figure 5.19 illustrates that as seniors in their departments, 75% of the participants agreed that *“Everyone is responsible for updating the employees or colleagues in their respective departments”*. On the other hand, 25% of the participants said formal communication and updates in times of crises come from the Human Resources Manager, their crisis management team leader.

It confirms The World Health Organization’s (2017: 4) conviction that there must be open and honest communication with internal stakeholders regarding the developments of a crisis. The internal stakeholders need to be notified of the car defect crises as they develop, from a potential issue right through to a car recall crisis. It may be of concern that the Team Leader or Human Resources Manager has to communicate with everyone regarding all crises as they occur. As much as this entails uniform communication being sent out, the practitioner may be overwhelmed by the number of people whose questions and opinions about the crises then need to be addressed. This, on top of their daily duties in the organisation.

5.6.2 Circumstances under which individuals are allowed to engage directly with the media during a crisis event

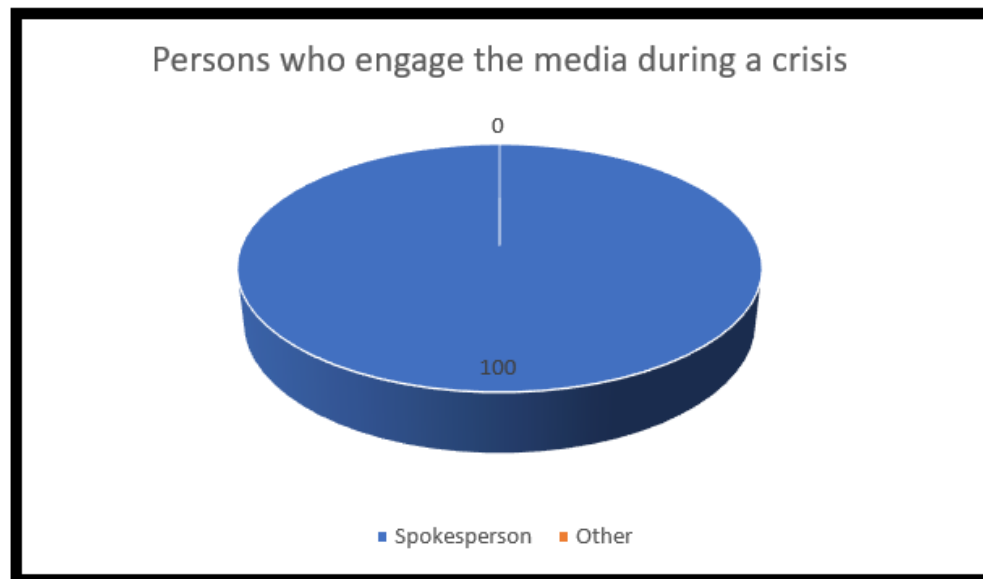


Figure 5.20 Persons who engage the media during a crisis

100% of the participants in Figure 5.20 expressed that only the appointed spokesperson speaks to the media.

The World Health Organization (2017: 4) also advises that organisations appoint a designated spokesperson who will liaise with the media during a crisis to ensure that they send out uniform messages. Thus, the organisations' practices are aligned with this advice to publish uniform messages.

5.6.3 Level of input individuals have into messages that are being prepared for external stakeholders

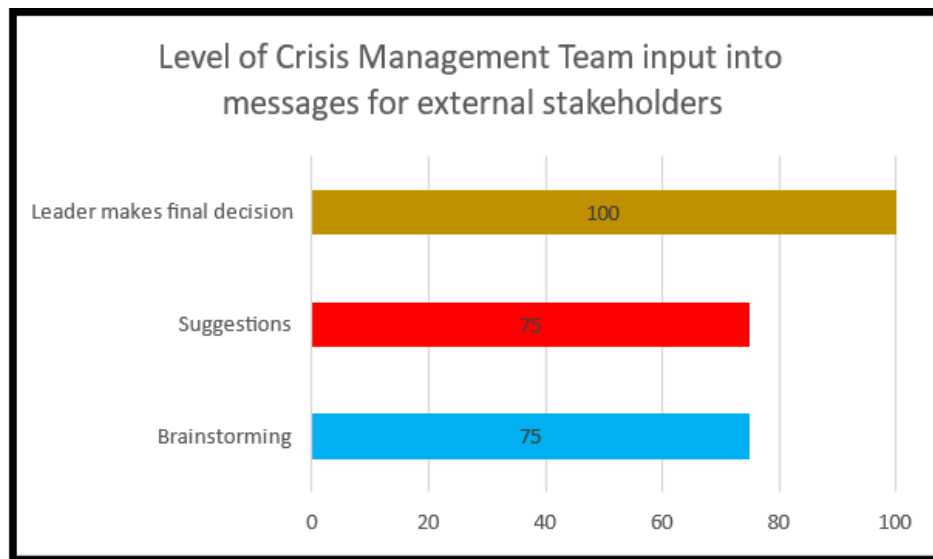


Figure 5.21 Level of Crisis Management Team Input into Messages for External Stakeholders

In Figure 5.21, it is evident that 75% of the participants highlighted that as team members “...*representing different departments,*” they are allowed to brainstorm possible risks, issues, and crises as well as suggest solutions. However, 100% of the participants naturally said: “*the leader makes the final decision*”.

Juneja (2019: 1), agreeably, says a team leader who will take immediate charge of the situation needs to be appointed. However, this leader must first understand the critical areas of concern during emergencies and encourage employees to cooperate. This means that the team leader must listen to the crisis team members’ brainstorming outcomes and suggestions to potentially avoid car recalls.

5.6.4 Ways in which the employer enhances an individual's ability to protect the image and reputation of your company during a crisis

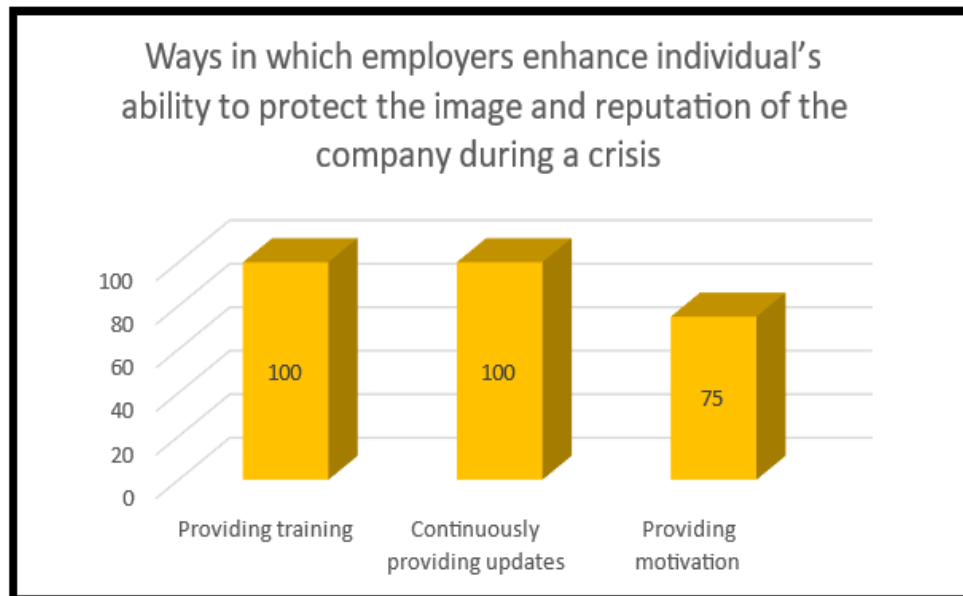


Figure 5.22 Ways in which Employers Enhance Individual's Ability to Protect the Image and Reputation of the Company During a Crisis

The consensus in Figure 5.22 was that all employers (100%) provide training and continuously provide updates to their employees, and many (75%) of the employers also provide motivation to their employees during crises.

The responses concur with Smith (2021: 1) and Perkbox (2021: 1), who determine that proactive crisis management depends on a well-trained workforce who know their roles and responsibilities. Employees must know how to act when required and understand how their part fits the overall plan. Ultimately, the organisation's performance is dependent on how efficiently employees perform. Thus, employees can be called the backbone of an organisation, and healthy, well-trained, knowledgeable, motivated employees help prosper and grow the organisation.

If the staff are well-trained, continuously updated and motivated, they will understand that sharing of pictures of burning cars on social media not only harms their employer's reputation, but it also puts their jobs at risk. Staff will also know that their organisation has everyone's best interests at heart if they are motivated.

5.6.5 Limitations in duties within the context of crisis and information management

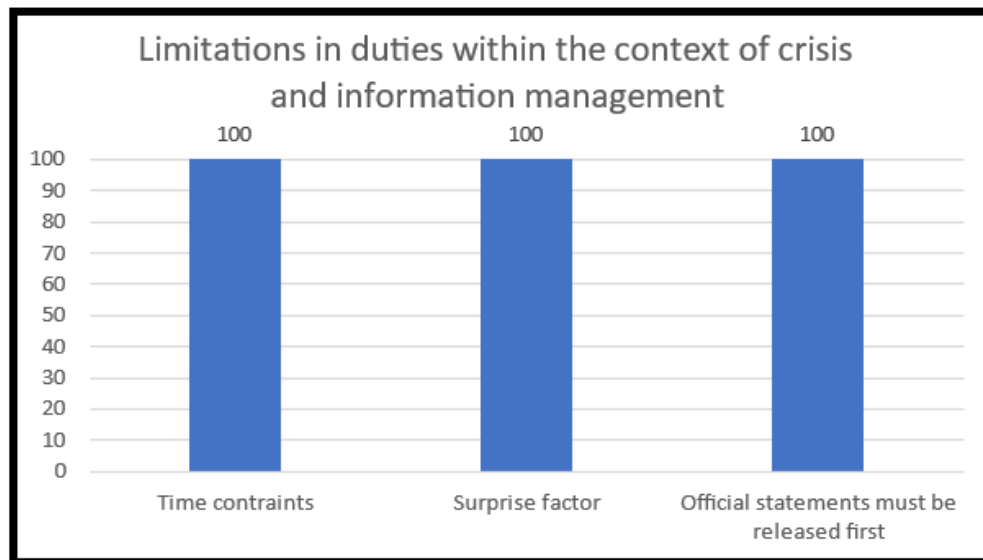


Figure 5.23 Limitations in duties within the context of crisis and information management

According to Figure 5.23, the participants all (100%) agreed that *“No matter how much planning is done, a crisis will always catch us by surprise”*. Another participant further said, *“and it always seems like we do not have enough time to respond,”* to which all the participants (100%) agreed. All the participants (100) also highlighted that *“the staff as a whole are also encouraged not to be involved in disseminating information that may be detrimental to the companies’ organisation. It includes sharing any pictures or videos of the crisis,”*. Thus, another limitation is not sharing information until formal communication about the crisis has been sent out. The biggest challenge was the time constraint in times of crisis.

These answers highlight Lando’s (2014: 5) conclusion that many organisations have a general Crisis Management Plan (CMP) designed to handle the actual crisis. However, when it comes to communicating with stakeholders about the crisis, many organisations are ill-prepared. Furthermore, The World Health Organization (2017: 3) suggests that an effective overall crisis communications plan should include a background where the organisation presents a situational analysis, where challenges, strengths and weaknesses relating to the crisis are included.

Communicating with the crisis management team or internal stakeholders at large during the potential stage may buy the organisation some time to effectively avoid car recalls. The surprise factor can then also be lessened or eliminated. This will mean as many

potential risks as possible can be identified by the internal stakeholders and possible solutions can be identified in their brainstorming and suggestions sessions.

5.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter's focus was on analysing primary and secondary data derived from interviews and case studies. The participants expressed their opinions, experiences and feelings regarding crisis communication and crisis management in their organisations and from those answers. Compared to the literature review, results show that the crisis management team members have a fair understanding of their organisations' crisis communication and management processes and the phenomena. Furthermore, it is evident that although companies use both traditional and new (social) media to communicate with their various stakeholders, social media is a more critical tool used to monitor public opinion and engage with external stakeholders. It is because social media allows for real-time interaction and information sharing. However, there are limitations and challenges in implementing crisis management, and time seems to be the main factor.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter analysed and interpreted data derived from interviews and case studies from selected car manufacturing companies. This chapter summarises findings, overall conclusions, and recommendations to improve crisis communication and crisis management in car manufacturing organisations.

6.2 SUMMARY OF THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Research is a scientific skill that relies on proof. This framework of thinking encourages one to question what has been observed, systematically explore the phenomenon further to understand and explain observations comprehensively and draw conclusions and provide interferences. It is about being inquisitive, which leads to critically and analytically gaining in-depth knowledge of a phenomenon's rationale, relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency. Therefore, research is an integral part of ethical professional practice for countless professions (Kumar 2019: 4). Concurring, Mishra and Alok (2017: 1) say that research is the "art of systematic investigation". Furthermore, research remains an integral part of public relations as it is the first step in the public relations process.

Macnamara (2016: 5) acknowledges the RACE acronym as the four main stages of the public relations process, namely: research, action, communication, and evaluation. Research is not a once-off but an ongoing process in public relations. At every stage of the public relations process, research is applied. Research never ends whether public relations practitioners or crisis management teams are environmental scanning, conducting public relations or communication audits, or steering social audits. Thus, public relations practitioners must acquire a greater understanding of research to function effectively in the organisational environment.

As part of project management, risk management entails the identification, analysing and responding to project risks. It includes maximising positive results and minimising the consequences of adverse events. In the automotive industry, however, lead time for developing and mass-producing new vehicle models is significantly decreasing in the quest to be competitive. As a result, it becomes challenging to detect possible errors relating to components and processes timeously. It also means less time to react.

Nonetheless, to successfully launch a new model, organisations need to define methods where possible risks are detected and take retentive actions on time. Russell and Taylor (2014: 20) add that companies that compete on innovation create a business culture that encourages taking risks, challenging the status quo, and accepting failure as part of their learning process.

This study employed qualitative research to assess crisis management and communication practices at four car manufacturing companies' headquarters in Gauteng, South Africa. In addition, the researcher analysed case studies and interviewed the companies' crisis management teams to acquire literature and address the study's objectives. The researcher chose specific car manufacturing companies because of the grave nature of the crises they have experienced where some saw their cars burst into flames. In addition, the researcher selected the crisis management teams due to their essential involvement in implementing crisis communication as part of crisis management during and after a crisis has occurred.

6.3 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Below is a summary of the chapters of this study:

Chapter One: Overview of the Study

Chapter one introduced the topic of the study, provided background and an outline of the study, which aimed to assess crisis management and crisis communication at Companies A, B, C and D.

Chapter Two: Literature Review- Background of Crisis Communication and Crisis Management

Chapter two contained the literature review where the researcher discussed the terms and information about crisis management and crisis communication from various authors. This chapter also provided case studies of the companies in question to provide illustrations, which justify the need for this study.

Chapter Three: Literature Review- Theoretical Framework of Crisis Communication and Crisis Management

Chapter three discussed the various theories that organisations can utilise as the framework in their quest to manage crisis communication and crisis management. These

theories are the Systems Theory, Chaos Theory, and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT).

Chapter Four: Research Methodology and Design

Chapter four described the research methodology (qualitative) and the design (in-depth interviews and case studies) the researcher employed in the study.

Chapter Five: Research Results and Discussion

Chapter Five presented the results of the study. It includes a discussion and interpretation of the findings.

Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter six constitutes a summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations.

6.4 KEY FINDINGS

The key findings for each section in the interview schedule, which aligned with the study's objectives, will be discussed below.

6.4.1 Crisis Management and the Crisis Management Plan

The participants understand what a crisis is: it is sudden and poses a reputational threat to the organisation. All car manufacturers have faced the following four crises: immediate, emerging, sustained, and social-mediated. All companies have crisis management and prevention plans in place. All the companies have crisis management teams who know their roles. All companies have a selected spokesperson who deals with the media to maintain uniform information dissemination. What was worrisome is that a quarter of the participants did not emphasise linking the organisation to the external public as a public relations role. The same quarter was not aware that crises pose reputational threats for the organisation.

Furthermore, contingency planning and environmental scanning only made up a minority of the crisis management and prevention plans.

6.4.2 The Role of Communication and Role Players

Communication plays a vital and integral role in all organisations as they use various traditional and social media to communicate with multiple stakeholders. Internally and externally, information about a crisis in the organisation is first communicated at the emerging stage, right through to the dormant stage. It is evident from 75% of the participants. Organisations, therefore, keep their stakeholders informed about the development of the crisis. Furthermore, it shows that organisations aim to be proactive in crisis communication instead of being reactive. Although companies use traditional media, social media showed more prominence in the companies' quest to perform environmental scanning where public opinion is concerned.

On the other hand, some of the participants did not feel inspired or motivated by internal communication. Once again, some participants did not mention the linking role of communication, which may point to them seeing external communication as one-way communication. Furthermore, 25% of the organisations only begin communicating about the crisis – internally and externally- at the current stage, which is a more reactive than proactive means of crisis management. This means that crises will continue bringing about an element of surprise for the organisations and time will never be enough to deal with the crises.

6.4.3 Communication Tools and Techniques

All organisations use social media, company websites and traditional media to disseminate and monitor incoming messages. The prominent social media platforms were Facebook and Twitter. Digital print media was also prominent. Participants alluded to evaluating the effectiveness of the organisation's outgoing messages by asking reflective questions about the message's simplicity, specificity, structure, and stickiness. The participants also stated that they evaluated incoming messages by ensuring that they switch on notifications to get instant alerts as and when messages are received. In addition, public opinion, especially those of opinion leaders, is monitored continuously. Lastly, frequently asked questions or raised issues have prominence based on their potential consequences.

However, although they were aware that reflective questions are asked when evaluating the effectiveness of outgoing messages, 25% of the participants were not aware of the

actual questions. In addition, the same participants seemed to be ill-informed about what opinion leaders are, which is a cause for concern.

6.4.4 Constraints in Crisis Communication Implementation

In the ever-changing public relations and business, it is normal for organisations to have challenges in crisis management implementation. All participants stated that time is of the essence during a crisis, and regardless of how much organisations plan, there never seems to be enough time to tackle it thoroughly. The researcher noted that since each crisis management team has a spokesperson, other team members should not communicate with the media under no circumstances. Internally, however, each team member is responsible for the members of their respective department for 75% of the companies. The Human Resources Manager is responsible for the same task in 25% of the companies. Team members, and staff at large, are also advised not to disseminate any information that could be detrimental to the organisational reputation- which includes videos and images of the organisation's crises.

Evidently, most team members highlighted that their employers keep them motivated, providing them with training and constant updates on the crisis and its development.

6.5 ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

Below, the study's objectives are mentioned and the extent to which each goal was obtained. In addition, interviews were conducted with the car manufacturing companies' crisis management teams and case studies about the said organisations were analysed to receive relevant information that speaks to the attainment of each objective.

6.5.1 To assess the crisis management plans

This study shows that all the organisations have a crisis management plan carried out by their crisis management teams. However, not all crisis management team members know that a crisis poses reputational, ultimately survival, threats for organisations. All the companies have experienced all four types of crises which are: immediate, emerging, sustained, and social-mediated.

As mentioned before, Lando (2014: 5) warns that most organisations only have a broad Crisis Management Plan designed to overcome the actual crisis at hand. Therefore, when it comes to disseminating communication to the various stakeholders, many organisations are ill-equipped because they lack a Crisis Communication Plan.

6.5.2 To assess the crisis communication monitoring and evaluation tools and techniques

All companies use both traditional and social media to monitor incoming and outgoing communication. Social media is the most widely used communication tool in companies- specifically Facebook and Twitter. Messages are monitored daily, and prominence is given to opinion leaders and frequently asked questions and topics. Crises are mostly communicated from the emerging stage, which shows their effort in being proactive crisis managers.

According to the Corporate Finance Institute (2021: 1), risk management is essential in its ability to empower organisations with the vital tools needed to identify and deal with possible risks adequately. Communications tools used to implement strategies (World Health Organization, 2017: 3) may include news releases, social media, brochures, radio announcements, press conferences and media interviews. Organisations should ensure that communication tools are appropriate for each audience. If time permits, materials and messages should be pre-tested on volunteer sample members of the target audiences in advance.

6.5.3 To evaluate the role that communication plays in a crisis

Communication and public opinion are central to the survival of organisations. All the participants alluded to that. Crisis management teams monitor public opinion through constant environmental scanning, prioritising issues with the most significant potential reputational threat. Most organisations value communication made by opinion leaders and monitor social media a lot.

Effective communication is the lifeblood of organisations and relationships in general (Management Study Guide, 2021: 1). Communication plays a crucial role in altering an individual's attitudes. For example, a well-informed individual will have a better attitude than a less-informed individual. Amid a crisis, organisations should ensure ongoing

communication between themselves and their stakeholders. It means the organisation must use various communication mediums to reach their stakeholders, decode the message and react through feedback (Nordquist, 2019: 1).

6.5.4 To identify crisis communication implementation challenges that the crisis management teams face

Indeed, challenges exist in car manufacturing organisations. These four companies were no exception. The challenges include waiting for formal organisational communication before addressing the issue with anyone, regardless of the crisis management team. Another challenge is fighting the urge to share information that is readily available on social media. All the participants felt that there is never enough time to deal with crises thoroughly, regardless of how much organisations plan. Since each crisis management team has a spokesperson, the researcher noted that no team members should communicate with the media.

The World Health Organization (2017: 3) suggests that an effective overall crisis communications plan should include a background where the organisation presents a situational analysis, where challenges, strengths and weaknesses relating to the crisis are included.

6.5.5 To make recommendations to improve crisis communication and management plans at the selected car manufacturing companies.

Based on the completed data analysis, detailed recommendations will be provided in the section below.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations made for the car manufacturing companies are discussed below.

6.6.1 Proactive planning and implementation of crisis management

Having observed how all organisations are prone to crises and have all experienced the four types of crises, it is of utmost importance that all organisations become more proactive in planning and implementing crisis management and crisis communication. As the saying goes, “prevention is better than cure”. It is especially true for car manufacturing companies as their crises – bursting of cars into the fire- can lead to loss of human life.

Therefore, the researcher recommends that all car manufacturing organisations continuously identify risks and issues before they develop into crises. It necessitates risk and issues management and possibly eliminates crisis management as a whole.

The fact that each organisation has experienced multiple recalls necessitates this. It also translates to regular updating of crisis management plans as and when necessary. Thus the plans must be flexible. Some of the participants alluded to rigid internal policies as part of crises they have experienced. Organisations should ensure that their policies are flexible for amendments at any time- especially given the surprise factor of crises and that they leave little time for combating and efficient information dissemination to various stakeholders.

6.6.2 Continuous training and motivating

Secondly, continuous and frequent crisis communication training and motivating of staff are essential, as well as refresher courses. It should include various role-playing of possible types of crises to keep the team abreast of their duties. It should also include having a dedicated psychologist that ensures that the staff members' mental health is constantly positive. Since all companies alluded to crises as surprises and leaving them with little time to address them, role play must take place from time to time. It will also ensure that the staff do not easily forget what to do.

As part of the training, it is vital to remind the crisis management team members what a crisis is as it poses reputational threats. Worst-case scenarios- such as job losses and even liquidation of organisations- should also be illustrated and the importance of each person's duty and how it fits into the overall crisis management strategy and company success. Furthermore, more staff members should join the crisis management team to lessen the burden on existing members. It will also motivate more staff members to feel important and included in critical organisational tasks.

6.6.3 Extend brainstorming to all employees

Thirdly, although the crisis management team is chosen and allowed to brainstorm possible risks and issues that may arise, it is advised that this exercise be extended to as many employees as possible. The staff on the ground are usually more aware of what customers may be saying or suggesting as they interact with them more frequently. It may

be done anonymously, although organisations need to ensure that their staff members feel safe and allow for open, honest communication.

Since the crisis management teams complained about not having enough time, adding more members to their teams may necessitate more members. It is especially true for the company where the human resources manager informs and updates all internal staff regarding the crises. Although it maintains uniform message dissemination, it may be overwhelming to be the only one answering the questions of the staff. This also means communicating about the crisis to internal stakeholders at its potential stage to try and eliminate the overwhelming element of surprise.

6.6.4 Hold meetings and workshops

Fourthly, although companies tend to send documents to all staff members, these documents are usually lengthy, and a number of them are sent. A crisis, once again, can mean the end of an organisation and meetings or workshops must be held where the severity of crises and importance of crisis management are stressed. As open systems, organisations need all staff members to understand this. However, 25% of the participants said they were not aware of what the reflective questions were. It is very worrying as they form part of the specially selected employees to combat crises. It is also important for organisations to understand why official communication about the crises needs to be disseminated by the organisation first. It seemed to demotivate some employees, whereas uniform information needs to be sent and its professional capacity.

6.6.5 Use both traditional and social media equally

Fifthly, organisations should make use of both conventional and social media equally, especially during a crisis. Many people turn to social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for answers during a crisis. Still, it is also true that not everyone has social media. Social media allows for real-time two-way communication between the organisation and its stakeholders. Many people still turn to traditional media for valuable information. Emails should also be primarily considered as clients' email addresses should be on a database, and emails reach users faster. In essence, all possible mediums of communication must be used during a crisis as the urgency of crises necessitates this.

Furthermore, the more a person sees the same warning, the more they are likely to take it seriously instead of dismissing it as fake news.

6.7 OPPORTUNITY FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The limitations of this study are that only four car manufacturing companies were researched on and only the crisis management team members were interviewed. Future studies can employ a wider population study by including other car manufacturing companies' crisis management teams and interviewing other organisational employees.

6.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter summarised the findings and conclusions drawn from the study. The focus was on crisis management and communication at four car manufacturing companies that have been recurring sufferers of crises before. The key findings were that the car manufacturing companies all have crisis management plans and crisis management teams in place, and the leader makes final decisions and speaks to the media in times of crisis. In addition, the team members had an overall idea of what a crisis is, and social media was used more than traditional media to communicate with stakeholders during a crisis. However, all the car manufacturing organisations complained that crises always catch them by surprise regardless of planning, and they never have enough time to implement the crisis communication plan.

However, a minority of the team members did not feel motivated in times of crisis. The literature review highlights the importance of proactive planning when it comes to crises. It stresses that organisations should have crisis communication plans and a crisis management team to implement them. The team members need to know their roles and responsibilities and receive adequate training. Recommendations on how crisis management and crisis communication can be improved in future were also made. It is vital for car manufacturing companies to better use crisis management and crisis communication plans to avoid them, thus avoiding reputational and survival threats.

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ANNEXURE 1: LETTER OF INFORMATION



Title of the Research Study: An assessment of the planning and management of crisis communication at various car manufacturing companies in Gauteng, South Africa.

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Talent Khuzwayo (BA: Corporate Communication; BA (Hons): Public Management and Governance)

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Dr Sameera Hussain (PhD: Marketing) and Professor Byelongo E Isheloke

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: Globally and locally, public relations and communications practitioners are constantly challenged with effectively implementing crisis communication techniques during the process of crisis management in their respective organisations. This study thus aims to assess the planning and management of crisis communication at various car manufacturing companies in Gauteng, South Africa.

Outline of the Procedures:

The researcher will travel to Gauteng, Company A and B's headquarters, to collect data through scheduled, in-depth interviews. The interviews will be semi-structured and will take 40 minutes to an hour per session where the interviewees will be expected to answer the questions as honestly and as detailed as possible. The aims and objectives will be clearly stipulated to the interviewees as well as the fact that the interview sessions will be recorded with a dictaphone.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: There are no foreseeable risks for the participants.

Benefits: The researcher aims to publish the findings of the study in the form of an article in numerous publications.

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study: Non-compliance and illness.

Remuneration: No remuneration available.

Costs of the Study: No

Confidentiality: Yes, the participants need not disclose their names or surnames.

Research-related Injury: There are no anticipated possible research-related injuries anticipated.

Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

(Dr Sameera Hussain) Please contact the researcher (073 8987706), my supervisor (031 373 5745) or the Institutional Research Ethics administrator on 031 373 2900. Complaints can be reported to the DVC: TIP, Prof F. Otieno on 031 373 2382 or dvctip@dut.ac.za.

General:

Potential participants must be assured that participation is voluntary and the approximate number of participants to be included should be disclosed. A copy of the information letter should be issued to participants. The information letter and consent form must be translated and provided in the primary spoken language of the research population e.g. isiZulu.

ANNEXURE 2: FREC APPROVAL



MANAGEMENT SCIENCES: FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (FREC)

10 October 2019

Student Name: **Ms S T Khuzwayo**

Student No: **21751973**

FREC REF: 56/19FREC

Dear **Ms S T Khuzwayo**

MASTER OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES: PUBLIC RELATIONS

TITLE: ASSESSMENT OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION AT SELECTED CAR MANUFACTURING COMPANIES IN GUATENG, SOUTH AFRICA.

Please be advised that the FREC Committee has reviewed your proposal and the following decision was made: **Approved – Ethics Level 2**

Date of FRC Approval: 18 September 2019

Approval has been granted for a period of two years from the above FRC date, after which you are required to apply for safety monitoring and annual recertification. Please use the form located at the Faculty. This form must be submitted to the FREC at least 3 months before the ethics approval for the study expires.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the FREC according to the FREC SOP's. Please note that ANY amendments in the approved proposal require the approval of the FREC as outlined in the FREC SOP's.

Yours sincerely

Prof JP Govender
Chairperson: Faculty Research Ethics Committee

ANNEXURE 3: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

A: Assessing crisis management and the crisis management plans at Companies A, B, C, and D

1. Crisis Management and the Crisis Management Plan

1.1 What role do public relations play in crisis management?

1.2 Describe what the company deems as a crisis.

1.3 Which of the following type/s of crises has the organisation faced?

Immediate Crisis		Emerging Crisis		Sustained Crisis		Social Crisis	Mediated	
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1.4 What crisis management (or prevention) plans are in place for the different crises?

1.5 Who are the members of the crisis management team (job titles)?

1.6 What role does each member of the crisis management team play?

B: Assessing the crisis communication monitoring and evaluation tools and techniques at Companies A, B, C and D

2. The role of communication and role players

2.1 What is the primary objective of internal communication?

2.2 What is the primary objective of external communication?

2.3 At which stage/s of the crisis is the crisis communicated to internal stakeholders?

Potential Stage		Emerging Stage		Current/ Crisis Stage		Dormant Stage	
--------------------	--	-------------------	--	--------------------------	--	------------------	--

2.4 At which stage/s of the crisis is the crisis communicated to external stakeholders?

Potential Stage		Emerging Stage		Current/ Crisis Stage		Dormant Stage	
--------------------	--	-------------------	--	--------------------------	--	------------------	--

2.5 Which mediums are used to disseminate information internally in the event of a crisis?

Traditional Media		Social Media		Company Website	Other	
Specify _____		Specify _____			Specify _____	

2.6 Which mediums are used to disseminate information externally in the event of a crisis?

Traditional Media		Social Media		Company Website		Other	
Specify _____		Specify _____				Specify _____	

C. Evaluating the role that communication plays in a crisis

3. Monitoring and Evaluation of Communication Tools and Techniques

3.1 How are outgoing messages monitored within the organisation?

Traditional Media						
Radio		TV		Print Media	Other	
Specify _____		Specify _____		Specify _____	Specify _____	
Social Media						
Facebook		Twitter		LinkedIn	Other	
		Specify _____		Specify _____	Specify _____	
Company Website						
Other		Specify _____				

3.2 How are incoming messages monitored?

Traditional Media						
Radio		TV		Print Media	Other	
Specify _____		Specify _____		Specify _____	Specify _____	
Social Media						
Facebook		Twitter		LinkedIn	Other	
		Specify _____		Specify _____	Specify _____	

Traditional Media						
Radio		TV		Print Media	Other	
Specify _____		Specify _____		Specify _____	Specify _____	
Social Media						
Facebook		Twitter		LinkedIn	Other	
		Specify _____		Specify _____	Specify _____	
Company Website						
Other		Specify _____				
		_____		_____	_____	
Company Website						
Other		Specify _____				

3.3 How are external messages about the organisation and the crisis monitored?

3.4 What system or tools are used in evaluating (the effectiveness of) outgoing messages?

3.5 What system or tools are used to evaluate incoming messages?

D. Identifying crisis communication implementation challenges that the crisis management teams face in Companies A, B, C and D

4. Constraints in Crisis Communication Implementation

4.1 In times of crisis, who are the internal stakeholders you are accountable to?

4.2 Under what circumstances are you allowed to engage directly with the media, during a crisis event?

4.3 What level of input do you have into messages that are being prepared for external stakeholders?

4.4 In what way does your employer enhance your ability to protect the image and reputation of your company during crisis?

4.5 What limitations do you have in your duties within the context of crisis and information management?

E. Making recommendations to improve crisis communication and management plans at the selected car manufacturing companies

IV. CLOSING

We have discussed a lot on planning and managing crisis communication, and I now have a lot of clarity. Because of your knowledge, I can now identify gaps in planning and managing crisis communication and recommend solutions to remedy them. I would like to reiterate that you will remain anonymous and that confidential information will be kept throughout the research.

Thank you for your participation! Your identity will remain private.

ANNEXURE 4: CONSENT LETTER 1



Faculty of Management Sciences

Department of Public Relations

17 October 2018

RE: CONSENT TO CONDUCT MASTERS RESEARCH WITH BMW

Good day

I am studying towards a Master of Management Sciences (Public Relations) at the Durban University of Technology (DUT).

I request to visit BMW to conduct interviews with relevant staff members and to utilise the brand as my case study for my Masters research. The study aims to assess the planning and management of crisis communication at various car manufacturing companies in Gauteng, South Africa. It is anticipated that the findings will identify possible gaps in crisis communication planning and implementation, given the forever-changing business and public relations environments in which organisations operate in. The findings of the study will assist public relations practitioners today and in future to be able to effectively handle various crisis situations, not only at BMW but at various organisations as well.

I would like to conduct in-depth interviews (at agreed upon times and dates) which will contain a set of semi-structured open-ended questions. I, the researcher will remain ethical at all times and anonymity will be adhered to should the interviewees as well as the company choose to remain anonymous.

Should you require further information, feel free to contact me or my supervisor.

I look forward to working in partnership with you and assisting in further strengthening the prestigious BMW brand.

Kind Regards

Student: Miss Talent Sinenhlanhla Khuzwayo

073 8987706/ 081 5362379

khuzwayots@gmail.com

Dr Sameera Hussain

Supervisor / Promoter

(031) 3735745

sameerah@dut.ac.za

ANNEXURE 5: CONSENT LETTER 2



Faculty of Management Sciences

Department of Public Relations

17 October 2018

RE: CONSENT TO CONDUCT MASTERS RESEARCH WITH MINI

Good day

I am studying towards a Master of Management Sciences (Public Relations) at the Durban University of Technology (DUT).

I request to visit MINI to conduct interviews with relevant staff members and to utilise the brand as my case study for my Masters research. The study aims to assess the planning and management of crisis communication at various car manufacturing companies in Gauteng, South Africa. It is anticipated that the findings will identify possible gaps in crisis communication planning and implementation, given the forever-changing business and public relations environments in which organisations operate in. The findings of the study will assist public relations practitioners today and in future to be able to effectively handle various crisis situations, not only at MINI but at various organisations as well.

I would like to conduct in-depth interviews (at agreed upon times and dates) which will contain a set of semi-structured open-ended questions. I, the researcher will remain ethical at all times and anonymity will be adhered to should the interviewees as well as the company choose to remain anonymous.

Should you require further information, feel free to contact me or my supervisor.

I look forward to working in partnership with you and assisting in further strengthening the prestigious MINI brand.

Kind Regards

Student: Miss Talent Sinenhlanhla Khuzwayo

073 8987706/ 081 5362379

khuzwayots@gmail.com

Dr Sameera Hussain

Supervisor / Promoter

(031) 3735745

sameerah@dut.ac.za

ANNEXURE 6: GATEKEEPER'S PERMISSION (COMPANY A)

BMW Dealer
MINI Dealer

Sandton Auto



19 October 2018

To Whom It May Concern (DUT)

RE: Master's Research for DUT student

I, Ayanda Cele Sales Manager for MINI Sandton Auto, give Talent Sinenhlanhla Khuzwayo permission to visit our head office in Gauteng which is on 126 Rivonia Road , to conduct interviews with relevant staff members for her Master's research.

She may visit the branch at any time, provided that dates and times of the visitation are communicated approximately a week or two in advance.

Thank you so much.

MINI Roanode

Ayanda Cele
MINI Sales Manager
MINI Dealership.
Sandton Auto BMW & MINI
Tel: +27-11-676-6600
Direct: +27-11-676-6688
Cell: +27-82-774-3048
Mail: ayanda.cele@minidealer.co.za
Web: <http://www.mini-sandtonauto.co.za/>
MINI Finance: www.miniselect.co.za

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Hyde Park Auto (Pty) Ltd.

Trading As
Sandton Auto

Registration No
2006/013264/07

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Telephone
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Facsimile
011 - 6767 - 8661

Internet
<http://www.mini-sandtonauto.co.za/>
Email
sandtonauto@minidealer.co.za

ANNEXURE 7: GATEKEEPER'S PERMISSION (COMPANY B)

BMW Dealer
MINI Dealer

Sandton Auto



To Whom It May Concern (DUT)

RE: Master's Research for DUT student

I, Ayanda Cele Sales Manager for MINI Sandton Auto, give Talent Sinenhlanhla Khuzwayo permission to visit our head office in Gauteng which is on 126 Rivonia Road , to conduct interviews with relevant staff members for her Master's research.

She may visit the branch at any time, provided that dates and times of the visitation are communicated approximately a week or two in advance.

Thank you so much.

MINI Representative

Ayanda Cele
MINI Sales Manager
MINI Dealership.
Sandton Auto BMW & MINI
Tel: +27-11-676-6600
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MINI Finance: www.miniselect.co.za

Company
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Company
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Sandton Auto
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ANNEXURE 8: TURNITIN REPORT

4/9/22, 4:38 PM

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1/47

Triedstone Consulting

* Proofreading * Copyediting * Data analysis * Digital marketing

21 November 2021

Ms Talent Sinenhlanhla Khuzwayo
Durban University of Technology
ML Sultan Campus
Durban
khuzwayots@gmail.com

Editing Certificate

We certify that the thesis titled: *An assessment of crisis communication at selected car manufacturing companies in Gauteng, South Africa* was proofread and edited for grammar, spelling, punctuation and overall style. The editors ensured there were no alterations to the author's original intended meanings during the review. Furthermore, the editors tracked all recommendations and amendments with the Microsoft Word "Track Changes" feature. Therefore, the author had the option to accept or reject each change.

Thank you for the opportunity.

Sincerely,

Joseph Olusegun Adebayo, PhD.
Executive Director