

**Crisis Communication in theory and practice: Analysis of cultural
influence, strategy applicability, and stakeholder relevance in
Australia and New Zealand**

Natascha Pancic

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

Master of International Communication

Unitec New Zealand, 2010

ABSTRACT

This research project explores crisis communication in theory and practice in Australia and New Zealand with specific focus on cultural influence, strategy applicability, and stakeholder relevance.

A mixed-method approach was used to evaluate crisis communication in its theoretical and practical constituents. The research project comprises of the two data collection methods of content analysis and in-depth interviews. The content analysis, the selected method to evaluate the theory, was conducted from published research studies in leading Australian and New Zealand Public Relations and Communication journals, the websites of the PRism journal, the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association (ANZCA), the Public Relations Institutes of Australia (PRIA) and New Zealand (PRINZ), and via the database search platform Ebsco. The content analysis provided information about the number of published articles, leading theoretical models, research methods, and research orientation.

The in-depth interviews, the chosen method to investigate the crisis communication practices, were conducted with three Australian and three New Zealand practitioners and addressed the issues of cultural influence, strategy applicability, and stakeholder relevance in crisis communication. However, both methods complement each other and add different perspectives to the research subject.

The findings of this research project indicate a dominance of non-theoretical, qualitative crisis communication research in Australia and New Zealand in the last ten years, while publications on crisis communication research in general are decreasing in New Zealand. The findings also reveal that the majority of studies employed case studies as a research method, using qualitative context analysis as the preferred data collection method. Overall, the research focus lies with the evaluation of crisis incidents, mostly exploring general crises such as those occurring in financial, political, and business sectors. With regard to the specific issues the results propose a clear influence of culture on crisis communication, especially in terms of audience perception and reaction to communication strategies. Organisational culture and structure is found to be an additional, significant

factor in crisis management and communication. The results also suggest that stakeholders, although considered as very important, are mostly regarded from the organisation's (sender) perspective. This one-sided approach does not take the stakeholder (receiver) perspective into account and neglects stakeholders as potential victims of a crisis.



DECLARATION

Name of candidate: Natascha Pancic

This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of International Communication.

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I confirm that:

- This Thesis represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2010-1071

Candidate Signature:Date:

Student number: 1325573

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their generous support of this research project, I would like to thank a number of people.

First, I would like to thank my great supervisors, Deborah Rolland and Edgar Mason, for their guidance, help, expertise, and patience through the whole process. Further I would like to thank Dr. Donna Henson, for pushing me in the right direction and lending me the book which gave me the final idea. Thanks to Dr. Jocelyn Williams, for filling in as a second reader on short notice, and Prue Cruickshank, for sharing her insights on the *Communication Journal of New Zealand*. I also appreciate the assistance of the Unitec Department of Communication Studies for providing such a great learning and study environment. Special thanks to Lisa Ingledew and Mun Naqvi, for all their amazing help and support in all areas.

Second, I would like to thank all my interview participants for taking the time, despite their very busy work schedules, to contribute to my research project. Furthermore, I would like to show my gratitude to Tim Marshall at PRINZ, and Julian Kenny at PRIA, for advising me of the right interview partners; the current PRINZ executive director Paul Dryden, and the current PRIA chief executive officer Jon Bisset, for allowing me the use of their respective Public Relations Institute's database.

Third, I would like to thank those people who experienced the whole thesis process up close. Many, many thanks to my fellow students Nenni, Coralie, Bonnie, and Géraldine, for suffering with me (and through me), during all the ups and downs which seem to go along with thesis writing. Thank you for all the times you made me laugh, listened to me, and allowed me to bore you with overly detailed explanations on my research project.

Finally I would like to thank my partner Sascha and my parents for their amazing, incredible support, patience, and understanding during all that time. I am very grateful to have you; you give me strength and keep me grounded.

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The Five Phases of Crisis Management (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993, p. 53).....	12
Figure 2: A Model of Organizational Culture (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 60).....	24
Figure 3: Crisis from a Receiver Perspective (Fediuk, Coombs, & Botero, 2010, p. 637)	34
Figure 4: Number of Crisis Management and Communication Articles in the Australian Mediums from 2000 to 2010	56
Figure 5: Number of Crisis Management and Communication Articles in the New Zealand Mediums from 2000 to 2010.....	57

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Image Restoration Theory Response Strategies (Benoit, 1997b, p. 179).....	30
Table 2: SCCT Response Strategies (Coombs, 2007a, p. 140)	31
Table 3: Overview Australian Publications (Sub-Question 1)	54
Table 4: Overview New Zealand Publications (Sub-Question 1).....	55
Table 5: Theories Applied in Crisis Management and Communication Research.....	60
Table 6: Data Gathering Procedures in Crisis Management and Communication	61
Table 7: Interviewees' Personal Backgrounds (Questions 1 to 3).....	66
Table 8: Rating of Organisation and Stakeholder groups (Questions 23)	84

ABBREVIATIONS

AJC	Australian Journal of Communication
ANZCA	Australian and New Zealand Communication Association
APPRJ	Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CJNZ	Communication Journal of New Zealand
Ebsco	Platform for Communication Databases
ED	Executive Director
JPRR	Journal of Public Relations Research
PR	Public Relations
PRIA	Public Relations Institute of Australia
PRINZ	Public Relations Institute of New Zealand
PRism	Online Public Relations and Communication Research Journal
PRR	Public Relations Review
SCCT	Situational Crisis Communication Theory

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Declaration	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Figures	v
List of Tables	v
Abbreviations	vi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Rationale and Purpose.....	2
Research Framework	3
Thesis Outline	5
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
Introduction.....	6
Key Definitions	8
Crisis	8
<i>Crisis Types</i>	10
Crisis Management	12
<i>Allied Fields</i>	13
Crisis Communication	15
<i>Culture</i>	19
<i>Organisational Culture and Structure</i>	23
<i>Public Organisations</i>	26
<i>Research and Theories</i>	27
<i>Strategies</i>	29
<i>Stakeholders</i>	32
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN	39
Methodology	39
Methodological Considerations	39

Choice of Research Method.....	40
Data Collection	41
<i>Content Analysis</i>	41
<i>Content Analysis Procedure</i>	42
<i>Interviews</i>	44
<i>Interview Procedure</i>	44
Data Analysis	46
<i>Content Analysis</i>	46
<i>Interviews</i>	49
Limitations	49
<i>Content Analysis</i>	49
<i>Interviews</i>	51
Ethics.....	51
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND RESULTS	53
Content Analysis.....	53
<i>General Trends</i>	54
<i>Review of Theoretical Frameworks</i>	58
<i>Methodological Trends</i>	60
<i>Review of Research Orientation</i>	61
<i>Review of Case Study Trends</i>	62
Interviews.....	65
<i>Background Information</i>	65
<i>Culture</i>	70
<i>Strategy Applicability</i>	78
<i>Stakeholder Consideration</i>	82
<i>Usefulness of Academic Research</i>	86
CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS	91
Content Analysis.....	91
<i>General Trends</i>	91

<i>Review of Theoretical Frameworks</i>	94
<i>Methodological Trends</i>	95
<i>Review of Research Orientation</i>	97
<i>Review of Case Study Trends</i>	98
Interviews.....	100
<i>Background Information</i>	100
<i>Culture</i>	103
<i>Strategy Applicability</i>	111
<i>Stakeholder Consideration</i>	114
<i>Usefulness of Academic Research</i>	119
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS	122
Summary	133
Limitations	135
Areas for Future Research	135
References	138
Appendices.....	146
Appendix A: Permission Statement	146
Appendix B: Information Form	147
Appendix C: Consent Form	148
Appendix D: Interview Questions.....	149

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A crisis is traditionally defined as an unusual situation or unexpected event that can affect individuals or organisations, may cause financial and reputational damage, or can threaten stakeholder relations (Coombs, 2009; Pearson & Clair, 1998; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007). Crises can occur in all kind of types and issues, ranging from political crises, corporate crises, to racial or religious crises. Increasingly organisations are conducting business across international borders and incidents in one country can affect the whole organisation, as the current BP incident in the Gulf of Mexico illustrates. Globalisation has increased the crisis threat, as crises do not occur as isolated events anymore; single events have the potential to expand to world-wide crises.

One example how an incident in another country can damage the reputation of an organisation in its home country is the Fonterra/San Lu scandal. The New Zealand based multinational dairy company Fonterra signed a joined venture with the Chinese dairy company San Lu, purchasing 43 percent of San Lu. In September 2008 San Lu had to recall 10,000 tonnes of milk powder after the sickness and death of infants through melamine contamination of the powder. The contamination was caused through criminal machinations and an estimated number of 300,000 thousands infants were affected with six infants even dying as a result. Fonterra went public, but as the incident was investigated, it became clear that managers at San Lu had knowledge of the issues for nearly eight months. San Lu and the Chinese government tried to cover the problem up, and although it was Fonterra who went public, the crisis overshadowed all their business operations. Fonterra got negative media attention worldwide.

The media scrutinised Fonterra's top management, suspecting that they had been aware of the issues for much longer and reacted too late. Fonterra was criticised for its involvement with an organisation in a country with lower safety standards and frequent safety issues, suffered losses of hundreds of millions in the end, and damaged its reputation worldwide. The main factors playing an important role in the scandal were cultural influences on business behaviour, crisis management and communication, lack of knowledge about business and safety attitudes in the host country, and supposedly late

reaction and slow communication of the issues which resulted in financial losses affecting all Fonterra stakeholders. Scholars point out that crisis communication plays a significant role in transforming the crisis situation by responding quickly, efficiently, and effectively to it (Coombs, 2010c; Fediuk, Coombs, & Botero, 2010). This is at least true by Western standards, but as the Fonterra example shows, it does not have to be true in other countries. The influences of culture on crisis communication will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Crisis management and crisis communication have increased in importance and become established corporate disciplines in the last twenty years (Coombs, 2007a). Studies show a drastic growth in published articles related to crisis communication. In fact, crisis communication has been one of the three main areas of public relations research in the last two decades (Ki & Shin, 2005; Seon-Kyoung & I-Huei, 2010). Although research in crisis communication has largely increased, scholars still see a need for research in terms of cultural influence, applicability of communication strategies, and stakeholder consideration (Coombs, 2010b; Heath, 2010; Kent, 2010). As these factors play an important role in the management of crises, the following chapters will evaluate the issues.

Rationale and Purpose

The purpose of this research project is to examine crisis communication in theory and practice in an Australian and New Zealand context. The relevant literature identifies gaps in the research, particularly in the areas of crisis communication and culture, strategy usefulness, and stakeholder consideration. Furthermore, there is also no systematic review of publications on crisis communication in Australia or New Zealand available. In order to give a general overview over crisis communication in Australia and New Zealand and to reach a better understanding of the specific issues revealed in the literature, this research will be focused on academic and practitioners' research as well as on practitioners' work practice. Therefore, this research project will be accomplished first, by an analysis of research completed on crisis communication in Australia and New Zealand in the last ten years. The research published in these two countries will be examined and contrasted with

Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) international study to evaluate possible cultural and national differences, identify major research trends, potential theoretical or methodological problems, and future research directions. Second, interviews with public relations practitioners will be conducted to complement the evaluation. Public relations practitioners' experiences and standpoints in both countries will be taken into consideration to evaluate cultural influences on crisis communication, strategy applicability issues, significance and consideration of stakeholders, and to examine how academic research contributes to practitioners' work practice.

Research Framework

The present research project intends to analyse crisis communication in theory and practice in Australia and New Zealand first, in a general framework and second, in consideration of cultural influence, applicability of strategies, and stakeholder consideration. The "local" focus is aimed to discover differences in crisis communication between Australia, New Zealand, and other countries. The research purpose has led to a division of the study into two units.

The first unit, the evaluation of crisis communication in practice, seeks to answer the following main research questions:

- (RQ1) How does culture influence crisis communication and its effectiveness?
- (RQ2) How do different circumstances such as an organisation's size, corporate/non-corporate status, or industry influence crisis communication and the applicability of communication strategies?
- (RQ3) How are stakeholders considered in crisis communication in Australia and New Zealand?

The second unit, the assessment of crisis communication research published in Australia and New Zealand, aims to provide a general overview about the area of interest in terms of frequency of publications, theoretical application and methodology, and research subjects. Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) research study has been used as a guideline to answer the following sub-questions:

- (SRQ1) How many crisis communication research articles have been published in the last five years in Australia and New Zealand?
- (SRQ2) How have theories been applied in crisis communication studies (i.e., theoretical application, use of research questions/hypothesis and names of theories)?
- (SRQ3) What are the methodological trends in crisis communication (i.e., quantitative/ qualitative methods, data gathering procedures and sources, and sampling methods)?
- (SRQ4) What types of crisis communication research have been studied (i.e. research focus, crisis types and crisis issues)?
- (SRQ5) What are the theoretical frameworks and methodological trends in crisis communication case studies?

In order to achieve more comprehensibility the findings of the sub-questions, which give a general overview over the research area, will be discussed and analysed first, followed by the results of the main research questions, analysing the specific issues. The exploration of the research area and the investigation of the research questions will be conducted through in-depth interviews and content analysis.

Thesis outline

This thesis is composed of six chapters. Chapter one gives an overview over the research area crisis and crisis communication, the purpose and research framework of this thesis. Chapter two presents and analyses the relevant literature in the area of interest. A particular emphasis is placed on the gaps detected in the literature concerning cultural influences, strategy applicability, and stakeholder consideration. Chapter three defines the research design and methodology and discusses the selected data collection methods, analysis of the data, limitations, and ethical considerations of the research. Chapter four introduces the research findings from the interviews and the content analysis. Chapter five examines and discusses the findings as well as their relation to the current research literature. Finally, Chapter six presents the research conclusions and recommendations as topics for future research drawn from the previous chapters.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The current research project aims to examine crisis communication in theory and practice in an Australian and New Zealand context. The main areas of interest for this project are publications on crisis communication in public relations (PR) and communication journals in both countries with regard to quantity and frequency, leading theoretical models, and research methods. Additional research interests are focused on cultural influences on crisis communication, strategy applicability, and stakeholder relevance. The following chapter reviews relevant literature for this research project. The first part introduces common definitions of crisis and crisis management including the allied fields of issues management, risk communication, disaster communication, and reputation management. The second part presents an overview of crisis communication in accordance with cultural influences, establishes common theories, models and strategies, and discusses the relevance and consideration of stakeholder groups.

Introduction

Crises come in all shapes, types and dimensions and can affect all kinds of organisations and key figures. Well-publicised events such as the Chernobyl reactor accident, the Clinton/Lewinski affair, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the sexual abuse cases in the Catholic Church, the tsunami in Indonesia, the swine/bird flu threat, the global financial crisis, or currently the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, made the news around the world and maintained intensive media interest for weeks and months. These events brought crises into the media spotlight and increased public as well as professional interest in the phenomenon of “the crisis”.

Crises are not separate or isolated incidents any more. A single crisis event has the potential to develop into a world-wide crisis. Scholars (Coombs, 2007a; Reid, 2000) observed that most crises nowadays are global due to the development of new communication technologies. Crisis events are broadcast globally and even remote areas of the world are now accessible to media and connected to 24-hour-networks. Through new

technologies, delays between an incident and the resulting media coverage are unlikely and media have a heightened interest in crises, because crises are dramatic and negative and therefore newsworthy (Ashcroft, 1997; Heath, 2010).

The increased attention on the phenomenon of “the crisis” has generated much research by academics and practitioners in the last twenty years. As Heath (2010) indicates, the main research interest in crisis is financially motivated - crisis creates damage and costs money, which creates the demand for knowledge on how to avoid crisis, minimise the potential loss, and respond appropriately to protect investment, human resources, and reputation.

Falkenheimer and Heide (2010) explain that crises are social, political, and cultural phenomena that originate in a great number of interacting causes and events, which through their complexity cannot be predicted. Benoit (1997a), on the other hand, argued that although crises come in a variety of forms, some potential crises can be anticipated. An airline, for example, has to expect an airplane crash every moment, just as a restaurant should always be prepared for cases of food poisoning. Scholars point out that organisations are exposed to possible crises every day which can damage an organisation’s reputation and cause stakeholders’ disapproval. Crisis events can range from property damage or loss, loss of life, environmental harm, to questionable decisions of the management (Fediuk, Coombs, & Botero, 2010; González-Herrero & Pratt, 1995).

A crisis can threaten the survival of an organisation and damage its financial, physical, and emotional structures (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Crises are more and more likely events for organisations, due to rapid technical development and globalisation among other reasons, and every organisation can be affected (Coombs, 2007a; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007). As Mitroff (2004) stated “... people want to believe that it could not happen to them. It not only can, but unfortunately, the probability is very high that it will” (p. 44). A crisis destabilises the normal order in organisations and managers are forced to respond rapidly to radical changes, disruptions, and uncertainty caused by crises situations (Coombs, 2007a; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993; Seeger, Ulmer, Novak, & Sellnow, 2005). Jaques (2010) emphasised that “virtually nothing can damage organisational reputation and financial performance more rapidly and more deeply than the

impact of a major crisis” (p. 9). The bottom line is that no organisation, public or private, is safe or immune to crisis as crises are a fact of organisational life (Coombs, 2007a).

Key Definitions

Organisations and individuals find themselves frequently in situations which can be defined as crises, such as the BP disaster. The necessary processes to react to a crisis are to prepare for it and respond to it, in short, crisis management. A critical constituent of crisis management is crisis communication. The variety of crisis events, types, and scenarios and the diversity of crisis research make it necessary to establish a framework and set the boundaries for this research project. Crisis, crisis management, and crisis communication are inseparably connected to each other and are to be explained and narrowed down in progression from crisis to crisis management to crisis communication (Coombs, 2010a).

Crisis

There are many descriptions of crisis, and although there is no commonly shared definition, scholars have made diverse attempts to characterise crises events and types. The focus of these selected definitions is on organisational crisis and although they may have conceptual similarities, they are not exactly the same.

A specific, unexpected and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten or are perceived to threaten an organisation’s high priority goals (Ulmer et al., 2007, p. 7)

A crisis, by definition, is an event, revelation, allegation, or set of circumstances which threatens the integrity, reputation, or survival of an individual or organisation. It challenges the public’s sense of safety, values, or appropriateness. The actual potential damage to the organisation is

considerable and the organisation cannot, on its own, put an immediate end to it (Sapriel, 2003, p. 348)

Adkins (2010) combined the most common crisis definitions and summarised them into the following:

An unexpected and unpredictable event which is caused by some type of event, threatens organisation's stakeholders' expectations, places non-routine demands on organisations, produces uncertainty in an organisation, has a negative impact on organisational performance, potentially produces negative outcomes, threatens high-priority organisational goals, harms either the organisation or the public, and produces accusations concerning the organisations(s) involved (p. 97)

The first three definitions have all the factor threat and potential damage to the organisation in common. In opposition to earlier descriptions of a crisis as a high-probability event by Mitroff (2004), Pearson and Clair (1998) defined crisis as:

An organisational crisis is a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organisation and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by belief that decisions must be made swiftly (p. 60)

The last two definitions add the factor time to the definition and the necessity for quick response. As the first four definitions are mainly focused on organisational crisis, Falkenheimer and Heide (2010) propose a definition which is utilisable for organisations as well as for society:

A crisis means that the normal order in a system is destabilised, which creates considerable uncertainty and requires rapid intervention (p. 514)

The majority of crisis definitions are used to reflect serious events which have the potential to seriously damage an organisation (Coombs, 2010a). Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2010) observe that the term crisis is often used to portray bad experiences and difficult times, but not all bad experiences or difficult times are actually crises. Sometimes events or issues are named “crises” in order to draw widespread attention (Seeger et al., 2005).

Generally a crisis could be summarised as a serious event which has the potential to affect an organisation and/or its stakeholders negatively if the situation or incident is not managed properly.

Crisis Types

There seem to be as many possible forms of crisis as there are different definitions of crisis (Kent, 2010; Massey & Larson, 2006). Crisis communication scholars have developed various approaches to categorise crisis types. Classifications comprise crisis types by cause, intent, responsibility, or time-scale.

Parsons (1996) divided crises into three different types: First, immediate - little or no warning that the crisis is on the way; second, emerging - slow in coming to a head, but no more predictable; and third, sustained -can last for weeks, months, or even years.

Mitroff (2004), on the other hand, assigned crisis events into seven major groups: First, economic, such as labour problems, stock market falls or crashes, and economic downturns; second, informational, such as loss of data, data tampering, and false information; third, physical, such as loss of key equipment, plants, material supplies, product failures, and explosions; fourth, human resources, such as death of key personnel, corruption, and workplace violence; fifth, reputational, such as defamation, gossip, rumours, and damage to reputation; sixth, psychopathic acts, such as product tampering, terrorism, criminal acts, and hostage taking; and last, natural disasters, such as fires, floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes. Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei (2010) used Mitroff’s definition in their study and added an eighth category with mixed and general crisis.

One of the most used definitions of crisis types in literature are Coombs’ (2007a; 2007b) and Holladay’s (2010) categorisations of crisis types by attribution of crisis

responsibility: First, victim crisis, which attributes minimal organisational crisis responsibility (e.g. natural disasters, rumours, workplace violence, product tampering, and malevolence); second, accident crisis, which assigns low organisational crisis responsibility (e.g. challenges, technical error accidents, and technical error product harm); and third, preventable crisis, which attributes strong organisational crisis responsibility (e.g. human-error accidents, human-error product harm, and organisational misdeed).

Research also shows that the greatest blame and most responsibility attributed to an organisation by stakeholders and public occur when the crisis is perceived as having been preventable. Human-error accidents, for example, are associated with strong perceptions of responsibility. The assumption is that if the organisation had done something, for instance trained their employees properly, the crisis could have been prevented. People assign little responsibility to an organisation if it is perceived to be the victim of others' actions or the crisis is caused by technical accident such as faulty parts or a natural disaster (Coombs, 2004; Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Holladay, 2010).

Ulmer et al. (2007) instead grouped crises by intentional acts of individuals and unintentional, unforeseeable events. Intentional crisis includes acts such as terrorism, sabotage, workplace violence, poor employee relationships, hostile takeovers, and unethical leadership. The unintentional crisis category includes natural disasters, disease outbreaks, unforeseeable technical interactions, product failure, and downturns in the economy.

Although many of the definitions show similarities, they are supposedly meant to approach and evaluate the phenomenon of crisis from different angles. Definitions of crisis often tend to concentrate on dramatic events such as plant explosions and neglect, for example, wrong management decisions, which are more likely to endanger an organisation's existence (Heath, 2010). Furthermore, as Kent (2010) asserts, most definitions of crisis are one-sided, focusing on the organisation in crisis and not on other affected groups. He points out that, for instance, outsourcing of manufacturing plants into less costly locations is seen as a 'profitable decision' for the organisation, neglecting the fact that the layoff of staff is likely to cause hundreds or thousands of individual stakeholder crises.

Crisis Management

Due to the heightened exposure of organisations to natural and human catastrophes, crisis management is an expanding area of interest. It is one of the dominant areas in public relations research and a crucial organisational function. Crisis management is a tool designed to fight crisis, minimize the inflicted damage and protect the organisation, stakeholders and industry from harm. Crisis management processes include preventative measures, crisis management plans, and post-crisis evaluations (Coombs, 2010a; 2007b).

Coombs (2007b) and Heath (2010) divided crisis management into three main work categories: First, pre-crisis (is concerned with prevention/preparation – what can be said or done to reduce the chance of crisis and moderate its harm if it occurs); second, crisis (actual response to a crisis); and third, post-crisis (revision, follow-up information, lessons learned, and preparation for next crisis). Pearson and Mitroff's (1993) more detailed classification (see figure 1) divided crisis management into the five phases of signal detection, preparation and prevention, containment and damage limitation, recovery, and learning. As both definitions illustrate, the descriptions are very similar, except that Pearson and Mitroff's model divides pre- and post-crisis management into two more, separate sections. Nevertheless, all authors describe the same management functions.

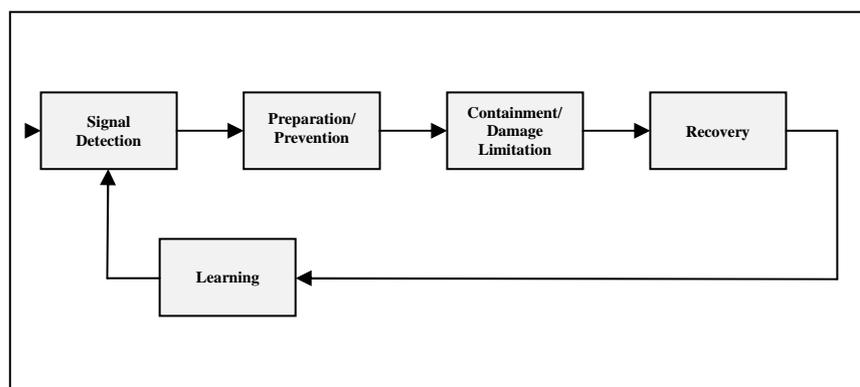


Figure 1: The Five Phases of Crisis Management (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993, p. 53)

Sapriel (2003) stated that crisis management must be directed from the top of the organisation and implemented in all key business functions. She pointed out that statistics illustrate that most organisational crises originate with management inaction or neglect and are non-event-related. Bad business judgement or mismanagement (corporate, individual, or governmental) is more likely to threaten organisational existences than one-time events (Heath, 2010). Conventional management is often of little use in crisis situations and it does not help with coping or preventing crisis. Furthermore, as Mitroff (2004) noted, conventional ways of thinking are often the cause of major crises as examples such as Ford/Firestone, Enron/Andersen, or the Mad Cow disease demonstrate.

Crisis management and crisis communication are also interconnected with the areas of issues management, risk communication, disaster communication, and reputation management. These allied fields overlap in conceptualisation and application and share an important connection to crisis communication (Coombs, 2010c) as the following explanations show.

Issues Management

The main difference between issues management and crisis management is the time-scale. An issue can develop over time into a major crisis (Ashcroft, 1997). Issues management and crisis management have a mutual relationship due to the fact that issues can create crises and crises can create issues (Heath, 2010). According to Coombs (2010c), issues are problems ready for a resolution. Issues management is the effort to identify and affect the resolution of issues. Effective issues management is also a form of crisis prevention; by solving issues, crisis managers take care of a problem before it develops into a full-blown crisis.

Risk Communication

Risks are related to crises and if neglected can cause a crisis (Falkenheimer & Heide, 2006). Risk communication is a dialogue between the organisation as a risk creator and its stakeholders as the carriers of risk. Risk is the potential to inflict harm or exposure to loss, and a crisis can expose an overlooked or undervalued risk. Effective risk

management can prevent a crisis and the crisis managers' aim is to assess risks in time and reduce them before they develop into a crisis (Coombs, 2010c).

Disaster Communication

The connection between disaster and crisis communication is in the fact that “all disasters spawn crises, but not all crises are disasters” (Coombs, 2010c, p. 59). Crisis communication and disaster communication are not identical, but they share similarities. Disasters are usually large-scale events which demand attention and coordination of multiple agencies. While disaster communication is designed to meet its main goal, public safety, affected private sector organisations have to address the needs of their stakeholders with their own crisis communication. Badly managed disasters can become crises for government organisations through poor execution of the disaster management (Coombs, 2010c).

Reputation Management

Image is essential to organisations, corporations, government bodies, as well as individuals (Benoit, 1997a). Reputation is the image stakeholders have of an organisation based on the fact of how well an organisation meets their expectations. Any crisis threatens an organisation's reputation (Coombs, 2010c). Effective crisis communication minimizes the reputational damage of a crisis and is therefore a tool in the effort to build and maintain a positive reputation (Coombs, 2007a).

Failures in all these related areas can result in the creation of crisis and the need for crisis communication (Coombs, 2010c). The potential for crisis is increasing and so is the potential for negative outcomes and the need for crisis management. Crisis communication has serious influence on the success of the crisis management efforts (Coombs, 2007a).

Crisis Communication

Scholars have long recognized the important role communication plays in effective crisis management. Communication decisions can make a vital difference in how the public perceives the organisation during and after the crisis (Hale, Dulek, & Hale, 2005, Sapriel, 2003). Falkenheimer and Heide (2006) even state that “risk and crisis communication are the core of public relations practice and theory” (p. 181). This section of the chapter will evaluate the role of crisis communication and the influence of national and organisational culture on crisis communication, crisis communication theories and strategies, and the consideration of stakeholders in crisis communication.

Crisis communication is a critically important component of crisis management and has received much attention in crisis research over the last few decades. A crisis creates the need for information and through crisis communication, information and knowledge are refined and shared (Coombs, 2010a). Bechler (1995) states that crisis communication is the “vehicle which drives exigency” (p. 3). Organisational crisis communication messages play a vital role in crisis situations; they provide information for those affected by the crisis and assist in reducing the damage and impact of the crisis on the organisation (Coombs, 2010c; Fediuk et al., 2010). Crisis communication operates in a unique environment due to the immediate risk of significant loss, time pressure, and stress (Hale et al., 2005). Heath (2010) points out that “the best-communicated crisis is the one that puts things right the most quickly and ethically” (p. 9).

Generally crisis communication can be summarised as a process of information collection, information processing, decision making, and information distribution of data necessary to address a crisis situation to internal and external stakeholders (Hale et al., 2005). Crisis communication occurs during all three phases of crisis management: pre-crisis, crisis response and post-crisis. Crisis response is the most critical and important phase as it is highly visible to stakeholders and significantly influences both public opinion and what stakeholders think about how the organisation is handling the crisis. Inappropriate crisis responses can aggravate a crisis situation (Coombs, 2010a; Hale et al., 2005). Internal and external crisis communication that is truthful, consistent, and

empathetic is crucial to turn a crisis situation around (Gregory, 2008). However, mistakes in communication are often only recognised in retrospect.

A critical feature of crisis communication is the management of complex organisational communication relationships. Gregory (2008) pointed out that communicating in a crisis is a difficult balancing act. Organisations have to decide what messages to give out internally and externally. In non-crisis situations communication usually flows through certain communication channels and follows the organisational chain-of-command. During crisis events the channelling of information through the organisation becomes more complex (Quarantelli, 1998; Ulmer, 2001). Falkenheimer and Heide (2010) explain that the key rules of crisis communication are to respond immediately and get information out to all key audiences in simple and understandable messages. However, they argue, what sounds simple on paper is more difficult in practice. In an actual crisis, organisational culture and structure influence the application of crisis communication. Organisations often find it difficult to adjust to the crisis situation with all the new requirements. In order to maintain credibility with stakeholders, the management has to react and respond quickly; information has to be effectively managed and given out at the same time to all affected parties (Ashcroft, 1997; Evans, O'Malley Hammersley, & Robertson, 2001; Nikolaev, 2010).

Sellnow and Vidoloff (2009) emphasise that there is no substitute for the truth in crisis communication. Deceptions and fabrications by the organisation before, during, or after a crisis will be eventually revealed by the media. In their opinion being honest is essential for responsible crisis communication and organisations lacking these attitudes are most likely to be seen as guilty or trying to cover-up. One basic rule for handling a crisis is to tell the truth quickly, as the speed of media coverage pressures organisations to give out messages before speculations and rumours have time to spread. A slow reaction time also precludes an organisation from distributing its own side of the crisis story. The organisation has to communicate what they are going to do to solve the problem in a quick, accurate, and consistent manner (Ashcroft, 1997; Coombs, 1999; 2007b).

In contrast, Ulmer et al. (2007) warned that although "crisis communicators must communicate early and often following a crisis, regardless of whether or not they have

critical information about the crisis” (p.21), this recommendation is not always practical. Organisations which communicate too quickly in unclear situations often have to retract their statements later, which will be critically noticed by stakeholders and media. Ulmer et al. (2007) suggested that a certain level of ambiguity in initial statements can be useful to enable organisations to communicate with their stakeholders until the situation is analysed and accurate information is available.

Communication, particularly during a crisis, directly affects public and stakeholder perceptions of the organisation which can affect the long term interests of the organisation. Successful crisis communication can restore stakeholder confidence and protect the organisation’s reputation (Gregory, 2008; Massey & Larson, 2006). Falkenheimer and Heide (2006) stated that the main value of public relations and stakeholder relationships is most identifiable in difficult situations, when organisations have to face risks and crisis. Crisis communication plays an integral role in resolving events that can affect organisations in a negative and devastating way (Ulmer, 2001). One very good example of successful crisis management and communication is the Tylenol crisis in 1982. The Johnson & Johnson brand was faced with capsule tampering, resulting in deaths of customers. Johnson & Johnson immediately launched a massive PR campaign to inform the public and recalled 31 million of Tylenol capsules. The company brought the product back into the market with tamper-resistant packaging, but after another product tampering in 1986, the company substituted the capsules with pills and caplets. These potentially ruinous incidents were managed effectively and the quick and open response helped not only the company to recover quickly in market share as well as in stakeholder confidence, it also made the Tylenol case one of the textbook examples of how to manage a crisis (Shrivastava, Mitroff, Miller, & Miglani, 1988).

Caldiero, Taylor and Ungureanu (2010) consider media relations during a crisis as even more important than usual, as communication is often difficult due to the enormous pressure during these times. They point out that it is vital for organisations to communicate regularly with internal and external stakeholders. These groups can support the organisation during times of crisis and help frame the crisis for media and public. Still, crisis communication to multiple stakeholder groups is only half of the equation. Listening

to these groups is just as important as making sure that the internal view of how successfully the crisis is being managed is as close as possible to the external view (Sapriel, 2003; Ulmer et al., 2007).

New communication technologies have dramatically changed the way information and communication is transmitted in times of crises. Not only can news about crises situations be quickly spread around the globe, but organisations can also use new communication technologies to their advantage to communicate with internal and external stakeholders and get the organisation's message across (Caldiero et al., 2010; Coombs, 2007a; Stephens & Malone, 2010). For instance, in addition to the traditional press releases, organisations can also make use of emails, Web-posted documents, videos, audio, and Web-based commentary and analysis. One example for the use of a new communication technology which was not available in the past is blogging, which creates multiple communication possibilities for organisations and stakeholders (Caldiero et al. (2010)

The availability of new media has increased exponentially in the last decade and expanded the communication options for organisations during a crisis. Organisations are no longer limited to traditional media to communicate with stakeholders; they can also use internet resources. Organisational websites, for instance, are an effective and highly accessible way to provide different audiences with information about the ongoing crisis (Coombs, 2007a; Nikolaev, 2010; Stephens & Malone, 2010). Coombs and Holladay (2010) see the Internet as one option for organisations to communicate quickly with their stakeholders in a crisis situation. They propose that the development of the Internet had a significant influence on corporate communication. The speed and simplicity of information exchange has not only made it easier for organisations to communicate with their stakeholders, it has also changed the expectations of stakeholders. Time has always been a critical element in crisis communication and stakeholders now have greater expectations of immediate information about crisis events.

Social network tools such as blogs, Twitter, podcasts, and YouTube are also increasingly used to distribute messages, establish dialogue, or continue conversation with stakeholders. Another way to use social media can be for scanning of signs of a developing

crisis. Blogs, videos, or customer groups on Facebook provide vital information about how stakeholders perceive the organisation. Not only can organisations now use new media to communicate with their stakeholders in crisis situations. Stakeholders themselves can use, for instance, blogs to communicate and exchange information, not only with the organisation, but also with other stakeholders, without being limited by geography (Coombs, 2008; Stephens & Malone, 2010).

An often stated example of the successful use of social media for crises purposes is the JetBlue video on YouTube. JetBlue's CEO, David Neeleman, apologised publicly for an incident where thousands of customers were stranded for hours in airports and on planes during a snowstorm. The video was viewed more than 20,000 times in only four days and is seen as a very successful example for how to use social media to communicate in a crisis situation.

Culture

Geography also plays an important role in corporate communication. Due to transnational corporations with headquarters in one country and operations in host countries, communication is more and more international and requires conversing with multiple countries and cultures. Furthermore, globalisation possibly increases the danger of crises for organisations, as organisations often lack important knowledge of their host countries (Coombs, 2010b; Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Ulmer et al., 2007). This section of the chapter is going to evaluate the role of culture in crisis communication, including national as well as organisational culture.

Taylor (2000) supported the idea that organisations have to operate in a global marketplace in order to be successful. She explained that the implications for organisations are extensive, because what happens to an organisation in one country will affect the organisation in other countries as well. The notion about "one market, one strategy" is no longer true as multinational organisations operate instead in international marketplaces with a complexity of cultures and variations that affect how publics respond to organisational messages and organisational crisis. And, aside from cultural, ethnic, and religious differences, there are also regional differences to consider which impact on how

people respond to messages (Sison, 2009). Therefore, organisations have to understand the intercultural and international aspects of crisis communication and its practice. Taylor (2000) emphasised that:

Crises are exacerbated when they occur in an international environment. When an organisation lacks competence in understanding the cultural norms of host nations, then unfortunate incidents can become enormous crises that damage the relationship between an organisation and its public (p. 278).

Crisis communication is one of the most difficult challenges in the international marketplace. Cultural and societal variations affect the communication between international organisations and the public in their host countries (Taylor, 2000). Crisis communication has to meet the needs of stakeholders and the wider community. Gregory (2008) emphasised that in a multinational organisation, the wider community may include people on a global scale.

Scholars observe that multicultural public relations is an underdeveloped research field and with research conducted and analysed through established national frames and mostly done by Western scholars. Multicultural issues are still neglected, even if there is an increasing demand among practitioners working in multinational and multicultural environments (Falkenheimer & Heide, 2006). Hutchins and Wang (2008) observed that crisis literature gives emphasis to organisational crises which affected Western companies, especially companies in the United States. US PR models have dominated Western PR practice, but international PR has to consider cultural, social, and economic factors (Diaz, Abratt, Clarke, & Bendixen, 2008). With regard to these observations, Grunig, Grunig, Sriramesh, Yi-Hui, and Lyra (1995) also questioned the idea that public relations can be practised in a similar way in different countries, which is especially important for multinational organisations with businesses and publics in more than one country.

Lee (2004) analysed the Hong Kong consumers' evaluation of crisis incidents occurring in non-Western organisations. She stated that although crisis incidents in Asia have increased significantly, such as the SARS outbreak in 2003 or the Cathay Pacific labour strikes in 1998 and 2000, little research has been conducted in Asian cultures. Interestingly, although her study found some similarities to research studies in Western

environments, she also found significant differences in terms of public perception and acceptance of strategies. Responses viewed negatively and as non-responsive in Western cultures, such as “no comment”, were accepted in China where silence is often seen as a form of wisdom. Apology strategy, on the other hand, was seen as routine behaviour in China, because apologies are commonly used and overused in Chinese culture and this strategy was less valued than a specific offer for compensation.

Cultural norms and values influence and shape communication within national cultures. Hofstede (2001) defined national culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p. 11). Hofstede’s study of cross cultural management at IBM subsidiaries in 53 countries is still one of the most important and most cited works in literature. He identified four dimensions of cultural variability which influence communication through cultural values and norms: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity-femininity.

Power distance explains how members of cultures deal with inequality and conflict. Uncertainty avoidance relates to the way in which humans cope with ambiguity. Individualism-collectivism is used to explain differences and similarities in communication across cultures on and cultural and individual level. For instance, in individualistic cultures individual goals are more emphasised whereas in collectivistic cultures group goals take priority. Masculinity-femininity focuses on how gender roles are distributed in a culture (Hofstede, 2001).

Cultural frameworks help to explain how publics respond to crises and affect how an organisation acts during a crisis. Studies of national cultures show that, for instance, members of cultures with high uncertainty avoidance and power distance tend to react more quickly and strongly to perceived threats. An organisation’s lack of knowledge or ignorance about the public’s tolerance for risk in the host country can lead to severe damage of the organisation-public relationship. International organisations have to understand that their actions in a crisis situation will be analysed and criticised within the societal norms and cultural framework of the host country (Taylor, 2000).

One example is Taylor's (2000) case study about the Coca-Cola scare in Western Europe in 1999. Belgian children got sick after drinking Coca-Cola soft drinks and Coca-Cola first refused all claims of responsibility. Belgian, French, and Spanish consumers reacted strongly and stopped drinking Coca-Cola and related brand products. Other neighbour countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Denmark did not react that strongly to the same communication strategies. Using Hofstede's (2001) four dimensions of culture as a theoretical framework, Taylor asserted that Belgium, France, and Spain scored extremely high in uncertainty avoidance (high anxiety for unexpected, low risk taking, concern for security, safety and explicit rules) and power distance (mistrust of the powerful) whereas Sweden, Norway, and Denmark scored relatively low. The United States, home country of Coca-Cola was in both categories in the medium range. This example demonstrates clearly that one and the same incident can create completely different audience reactions. A strategy which was effective in one culture or country is not guaranteed to be successful somewhere else.

Scholars debate and challenge the usefulness of Western frameworks for crisis management and crisis communications in non-Western countries. The Coca-Cola case however clearly demonstrates that even Western countries cannot be evaluated through the same lens. Cultural variation in Europe can influence the public's reaction to an organisation's communication in a crisis situation. Kent (2010) and Coombs (2010b) point out that considering the number of organisations operating across national borders, understanding of how cultural orientations or boundaries influence the perception of a crisis and crisis communication is advisable. Coombs (2010b) suggests that key concerns in crisis communication research regarding internationalism should be "...how culture shapes perceptions of what constitutes a crisis, how stakeholders in different cultures react to the same crisis response strategy, how culture affects the selection of crisis response strategies, and how the expectations of stakeholders differ" (p. 722).

Complementary concepts can be found between national cultures and organisational cultures. Organisational cultures make distinctions between organisations while keeping their national environments steady. National cultures make distinctions between nations while keeping organisational contexts as stable as possible. Cultural

differences at national levels exist mostly in values and less in practices, while at organisational levels differences mostly exist in practices and less in values (Hofstede, 2001). Nevertheless, as Hofstede points out, national culture also influences organisational culture. His study at IBM locations in 53 countries demonstrated that there is no, in this case, uniform corporate culture as a company's culture always adapts to the local environment. Additionally, Eisenberg and Goodall (1997) argue that not only national, but also regional differences can influence organisational cultures. For instance, differences in how employees relate to internal organisational processes are to be expected between branches of one company in two different cities. This explanation leads to the conclusion that national, regional and organisational cultures also influence crisis management and communication.

Organisational culture and structure

Keyton (2005) defined an organisation as a “dynamic system of organisational members, influenced by external stakeholders, who communicate within and across organisational structures in a purposeful and ordered way to achieve a superordinate goal” (p. 10).

The term organisation implies some sort of structure and order to the way things are done. Organisations can be private or public, small family-owned businesses or multinational corporations, for-profit or non-profit (Cunliffe, 2008).

Organisational culture consists of values, beliefs, assumptions, norms, language used, rites and ceremonies, artefacts and symbols (Cunliffe, 2008; Eisenberg & Goodall, 1997; Keyton, 2005). Culture exists at different levels that influence each other, as organisations operate within countries and societies with their own values and norms. An organisation's structure is the basic framework and shape (skeleton) of the organisation (Cunliffe, 2008). An organisation is implemented and influenced by different factors, as Cunliffe's model of organisational culture shows. Organisations do not exist in a vacuum, but in an environment of national, regional, and professional culture which influences organisational decisions and communication. An additional influence on organisational behaviour and communication are internal structures, subcultures, values, and norms. As a

conclusion, these factors will also govern an organisation's crisis management and communication. An example of how national and organisational cultures and structures are connected shows the comparison of two organisations in different countries. For instance, in a US organisation individual achievements are more valued, due to the individualistic national environment, whereas in a Japanese organisation team and group achievements are more valued, due to the collectivistic environment. The national environments also influence leadership and communication styles, employment forms (long-term/short-term), and attributions of individual or collective responsibility (Eisenberg & Goodall, 1997). The aim of the current research project is to evaluate to which degree national, regional, professional, and organisational culture influence crisis management and communication.

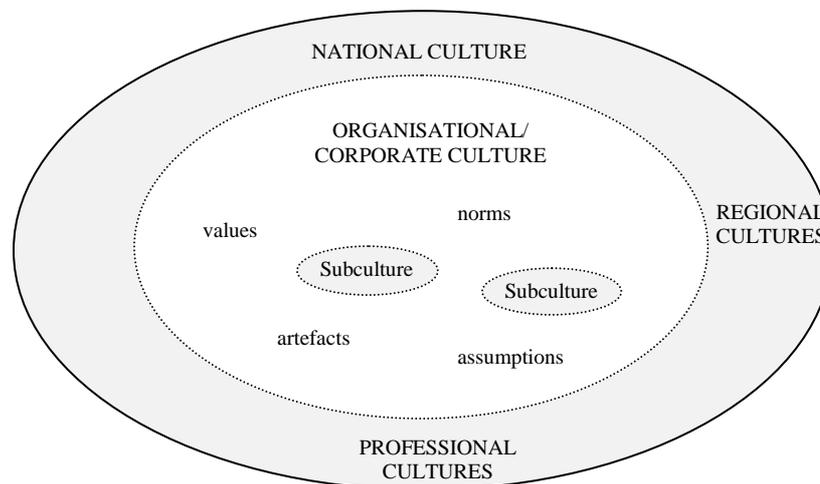


Figure 2: A Model of Organisational Culture (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 60)

Pearson and Mitroff (1993) observed that the 5 factors of technology, organisational structure, organisational culture, human factors, and top management psychology are inherent to a crisis system; they provide the framework for interrelating factors which influence crisis events in organisations. Taylor (2010) adds that the internal organisational factors such as organisational climate and culture among others influence the public relations messages more than the individual skills of communication experts. Organisational culture is an important factor in the organisation's ability to identify a crisis, to communicate with stakeholders and media and interpret information (Hutchings

& Wang, 2008; Wise, 2003). The key to turning a crisis situation around is good internal and external crisis communication. However, very often communication in a crisis situation reflects the overall organisational culture – if the communication flow is usually not very good in an organisation, it will not be any better in a crisis situation (Gregory, 2008).

Scholars observe that organisational culture can also play an important role in the creation of a crisis. Minor incidents may escalate and develop into a major organisational crisis due to problems such as dysfunctional communication patterns. A lack of communication and connection between organisational units limits the organisation's ability to recognise internal and external threats and interpret crucial information. Therefore, a crisis can be an indicator of structural problems in the organisation (Bechler, 1995; Taylor, 2010). Important for organisational culture and crisis handling is the top management's approach to dealing with issues, communication networks (especially those responsible for communication and transmission of information between internal and external audiences), the role of business environments, and organisational values and goals (Bechler, 1995; Hutchings & Wang, 2008).

Leadership in a crisis situation is crucial. Sapriel (2003) explained that a crisis cannot be managed by consensus, because of lack of time, threat and surprise elements. Though decisions have to be made by leadership and the crisis management team; they have to get control of the situation without getting lost in endless debates. In a crisis situation leadership is critical to providing focus, overview, bringing employees together, and leading the organisation through the crisis (Ulmer et al., 2007). Evans et al. (2001) found that organisational management is often reluctant to discuss major problems with their employees as they fear a loss of motivation, which could affect products and work quality. According to Evans et al. it is crucial in a crisis situation to implement effective communication strategies at all levels within the organization. Crisis strategies often do not work because management fails to communicate the necessary changes and prepare their employees properly.

Falkenheimer and Heide (2010) argue that the common view of organisations as rational units is not exactly right, as “many events in an organisation are not rationally

coordinated and controlled: plans are not rigidly followed, decision-making is delegated, there are coordination shortcomings, there is no complete control” (p. 519).

Avery and Lariscy (2010) point out that researchers have to take the influence of organisational structure on crisis communication more into consideration, as there is no “best fit” or “best practice” model available. Kent (2010) adds that most strategies are designed for large corporate style organisations, neglecting small or medium sized organisations which may not have the same requirements and resources as the big companies. A universal goal of crisis communication is to reduce and contain harm. Some goals might conflict with each other or lie in different areas, depending on the organisation affected. Organisations may seek to limit the reputational damage, publics may just want to be informed, and government agencies might prioritise the re-establishment of public order (Seeger, 2006).

Public Organisations

Public and government organisations are special types of organisations. Compared to corporations, only a few studies have examined crises within government agencies (Avery & Lariscy, 2010; Liu & Horsley, 2007).

This is even more remarkable as Heath (2010) states that “politics is a hot bed of crisis “and that crisis in the political context includes having persons engaging in conflicts of interest and acts of governmental officials based on selfish interest (versus the public interest) and lies and highly biased framing of facts, values, policies, and identifications” (p. 2).

Most scholars and theories do not make any allowances for government agencies and do not distinguish between public and private organisations. Most crisis definitions discuss organisations in general without taking the unique, complex, and service driven characteristics of government organisations into account (Tracy, 2007). Liu and Horsley (2007) argued that public organisations are subject to unique constraints which set government public relations apart from corporate public relations. These constraints include among others politics, legal constraints, media scrutiny and devolution of communication. For instance, legal constraints often “limit the ability of public agencies to

communicate fully and openly” (p. 379). Although government organisations also have to deal with internal and external stakeholders, in the same way as corporations, they are defined by political actions and relationships. In addition, public sector organisations have to face a higher degree of media interest, as every step and decision is analysed and scrutinised.

Avery and Lariscy (2010) point out that “the nature of publics of government agencies in crisis communication is unique and imposes additional considerations and communication agents in government settings” (p. 330). Publics, other than stakeholders of private organisations, cannot intentionally decide not to use the services of government agencies. As a result, government agencies have a higher responsibility and obligation for communication in a crisis situation than private organisations. Avery and Lariscy argue therefore that agencies crisis responses “cannot be examined through the same lens and with the same criteria suitable for other types of organisations” (p. 330). Thus, scholars suggest that public relations and crisis communication for government agencies may need a different approach than the currently used ones (Liu & Horsley, 2007).

Research/Theories

The variety and number of research studies in crisis communication has both advantage and disadvantage (Coombs, 2010a). The diversity of studies provides great insights, but the wide spread research areas represent an obstacle in the effort to integrate the various discoveries into a suitable and usable form. The research is scattered not only through numerous journals, but also across a variety of disciplines (Pearson & Clair, 1998). Articles can be found in communication, public relations, business, and management journals as well as in trade journals such as pharmaceutical or food production journals. The amount of available books and articles on this topic makes it difficult for crisis managers to keep up-to-date with the latest findings and ideas in crisis communication. Furthermore, even scholars do not agree about suitability and usefulness of the different crisis theories, models and approaches.

There are two different research directions recognisable in the young academic discipline of crisis communication. First, an academic, theoretically oriented dimension

and second, a praxis oriented dimension. The theoretical dimension focuses on what and how organisations communicate in crisis situations; whereas the praxis dimension focuses on when, where and to whom organisations must communicate in crisis situations (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010). According to Falkenheimer and Heide (2006), crisis communication as a research field is dominated by non-theoretical case studies, guidelines, and quantitative empirical surveys. Case studies, one of the main forms of research, are applied, descriptive research with limited generalisation (Coombs, 2007b; Cutler, 2004; Seon-Kyoung & I-Huei, 2010). Despite the limited generalisability, case studies can be a useful method to examine specific crisis situations, even though a study by Cutler (2004) showed that more than half of the case studies failed to describe a reliable data gathering method usable for replication of the research.

An analysis of published research on crisis communication in two major public relations journals over the last 30 years by Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei (2010) reported that the theories most used or most frequently cited were Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (20%), Issue and Crisis Management Theory (18.6 %), and Image Restoration Theory (10%). Other theories which were less often used or cited (with less than 10%) were Apology Theory, Attribution Theory, Contingency Theory, Situational Theory, and Organisational Theory.

To give the reader a brief overview the basic principles of the three dominating theoretical approaches, Situational Crisis Communication Theory, Issue and Crisis Management Theory, and Image Restoration Theory are summarised as follows:

Situational Crisis Communication Theory was developed from Attribution Theory and applies the same principles (responsibility and blame), but to a wider array of crises situations. The theory focuses on how perceptions of a crisis situation affect crisis responses and the effects of responses to an organisation's reputation (Coombs, 2007c; 2007d). SCCT is one example of the systematic and social scientific study of crisis communication (Coombs, 2007a).

Issue and crisis management have been explained in the preceding chapter of this literature review. Issue and crisis management are interrelated management functions in general concerned with detection of issues or signals for crisis along with prevention of

crisis, preparation for a crisis, containment and damage control in case of a crisis, recovery after the crisis, and learning from the crisis (Ashcroft, 1997; Coombs, 2007b; 2010c; Heath, 2010; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993).

The theory of image restoration is based on the two key assumptions of first, communication as a goal-directed activity with second, the central goal of maintaining a positive reputation. Image restoration strategies attempt to invalidate claims or suspicions of wrong behaviour or actions (Benoit, 1997a).

Strategies

Every crisis is unique. This makes it difficult to foresee all required strategies and components in advance. Every strategy and component must be cautiously modified to suit the particular situation (Avery & Lariscy, 2010). Additionally, organisational contexts are diverse, dynamic, and multifaceted. Contextual factors and situational variables have to be taken into consideration, because what is usable and expedient in one industry may have limitations to applicability in another (Seeger, 2006). Other factors for contemplation are the type of crisis and the surrounding circumstances. Kent (2010) supports this notion by adding that there is a need for more research examining which strategies work best or are most useful in specific circumstances. The knowledge of how one specific organisation handled a crisis is less useful than consolidated findings about how a number of organisations handled similar crises in similar circumstances. This section of the chapter is going to provide an overview over crisis communication strategies and compare two different approaches with each other.

Theories, models, and communication approaches suggest diverse, but often similar strategies to handle a crisis. The similarities make it difficult to relate strategies to certain theories or models. For instance, Benoit's (1997b) Image Restoration Theory and Coombs' (2007a) Situational Crisis Communication Theory have crisis communication strategies in common. Although differently named or categorised, they suggest similar tactics in crisis situations. For instance, a strategy which is called "shifting the blame" in Benoit's denial category is named "scapegoating" in Coombs' denial category, but both strategies intend to blame someone else outside the organisation. Another example is

Benoit's reducing the offensiveness category, suggesting "minimisation" (crisis is not that bad) as a strategy which is similar to Coombs' diminishment category, proposing "justification" (minimising the perceived damage) as a possible strategy.

Benoit (1997b) assigned his image restoration strategies into the five groups of denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, corrective action and mortification.

Response strategy type	Response strategy subtypes
Denial	Simple denial (we did not do it) Shifting the blame (someone else did it)
Evasion of responsibility	Provocation (we were provoked to act) Defeasibility (we did not have enough information) Accident (we did not mean for this to happen) Good intentions (we meant to do the right thing)
Reducing the offensiveness	Bolstering (we have done some good things) Minimisation (the crisis is not that bad) Differentiation (others have worse crises) Transcendence (we should focus on other issues) Attack the accuser (the accuser is irresponsible) Compensation (we will cover the costs of the crisis)
Corrective action (we will solve the problem)	
Mortification (we are sorry)	

Table 1: Image Restoration Theory Response Strategies (Benoit, 1997b, p.179)

Coombs (2007a) grouped his SCCT-strategies into four clusters of strategies which are perceived as similar. Denial strategies seek to reject the organisation's responsibility for the crisis. Diminishment strategies attempt to reduce attributions of organisational control over the crisis or the negative effects of the crisis. The rebuilding strategies try to improve the organisation's reputation. Denial, diminishment and rebuilding strategies also include varying degrees of accommodation, which shows concern for the victims and reflects on how much responsibility the organisation accepts for the crisis. Bolstering strategies are complementary to the other strategies and aim to build a positive relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders.

Response strategy type	Response strategy subtypes
Denial	Attacking the Accuser (confront person or group that claims that a crisis exists) Denial (state that no crisis exists) Scapegoating (someone outside the organisations gets blamed)
Diminishment	Excusing (try to minimise organisation's responsibility. Can include denying any intention to do harm or the claim that organisation had no control of the events) Justification (try to minimise perceived damage. Can include stating that there were no serious damages or injuries or claiming that the victims deserved what they received)
Rebuilding	Compensation (organisation provides money or other gifts to the victims) Apology (public statement that the organisation takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks forgiveness)
Bolstering	Reminding (organisation tells stakeholders about its past and good works) Ingratiation (organisation praises stakeholders) Victimage (organisation explains how it too is a victim of the crisis)

Table 2: SCCT Response Strategies (Coombs, 2007a, p. 140)

Coombs (2007a) noted that the variety of crisis response strategies is an indicator for the fragmentation in the crisis management and crisis communication research. Seeger (2006) claimed that developing best practices in crisis communications bears certain difficulties, as there are significant variances in crisis types and it is challenging to identify a significantly large sample of cases to create generalised rules and principles. Moreover, also type, organisational history and the specific dynamics of the crisis are critical factors which play an important role in crisis and make generalisation difficult.

As a result, scholars and practitioners have problems defining “the best practice approach” although there are sets of rules available how to react. Still, research reveals that organisations frequently make obvious mistakes in their crisis communication such as denying the crisis, evading responsibility, trying to shift blame, or lying about evidence (Nathan, 2000; Ulmer et al., 2010). Mitroff (2004) observed that one of the most significant barriers to effective crisis handling is denial.

Kim, Avery and Lariscy (2009) analysed public relations research from 1991 to 2009, using the framework of Benoit's (1997b) Image Restoration Theory and Coombs'

(2007a) Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Their study shows that the most frequently used crisis response strategies by organisations were bolstering (58.8%), denial (56.9%), mortification (45.1%), attack-the-accuser (36.7%), and shifting-the-blame (34.7%). They observed that the most effective crisis strategies were full apology (71.4%), mortification (52.4%), corrective action (52.2%), and bolstering (50%). The least effective strategy, in regard of the outcome of the crisis situation, was denial although it was the most often used strategy. The majority of crises were preventable crisis (53%), accident (31%), and victim (20%). Their research apparently demonstrates that practitioners do not seem to consider advice directives developed by academic research (Galloway, 2004; Sterne, 2008). The findings suggest that there may be a gap between crisis communication practice and academic research. For instance, the denial strategy, which ignores the victims of a crisis, is only useful if the organisation has really no responsibility for a crisis (Coombs, 1999).

Lee's (2000, as cited in Lee, 2004) analysis of strategies used by organisations in Hong Kong indicated that shifting the blame, minimisation, no comment, apology, compensation, and corrective action were the most often used strategies. This shows strong similarities, except for the no comment strategy, to Kim's et al. (2009) study above.

Stakeholders

No matter what type of organisation is affected - how stakeholders acknowledge, perceive, and experience a situation has implications for whether or not that event becomes a crisis (Coombs, 2007a; 2010a; Falkenheimer & Heide, 2010). This section of the chapter will investigate the role and relevance of stakeholder groups in crisis management and communication.

Stakeholders are persons or groups who have an interest in an organisation, are affected by it, or can affect it. The idea behind the term stakeholder is the concept of ownership and because stakeholders "own" what an organisation does, the organisation has to consider their views and perceptions and justify its actions (Coombs, 2007a; Galloway & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2005). Stakeholders can be internal or external groups, such as employees, competitors, creditors, consumers, government agencies, communities,

stockholders and the media. Ulmer et al. (2007) differentiated between primary and secondary stakeholder. Primary stakeholders are most important to an organisation's success; secondary stakeholders do not play an active role in everyday business, but are still vital for its overall success.

Scholars propose that the relationship between organisations and stakeholders is comparable to psychological contracts. Stakeholders expect certain behaviours from an organisation and feel wronged if the organisation, for instance during a crisis event, does not behave according to their expectations. Stakeholders perceive the organisation as having breached the psychological contract and react to that. The greater the incongruity between expected and actual behaviour, the more serious is the damage caused by the organisation's contract breach. The psychological contract is based on what the stakeholder thinks has been agreed to, which may not actually meet what really has been agreed to by the organisation. If stakeholders believe that a term was agreed to they will hold the organisation responsible for it, even if it was not really agreed to by the organisation (Fediuk et al., 2010).

Fediuk et al. (2010) emphasise that not all stakeholders perceive crisis events in the same way or are impacted by them to the same degree. Different stakeholder groups have different expectations, priorities and values. For example, shareholders will be more affected by falling share-prices than other stakeholder groups. The more an incident impacts on personal goals of a specific stakeholder group, the more serious is the crisis incident for this group. Fediuk et al. observe that stakeholders' responses to crisis events are to evaluate the situation and assess the organisation's role in causing the situation, as the following model illustrates. The higher the degree to which the organisation is seen as responsible and blameable, the more aggravating stakeholder's reactions will be (Park & Len-Rios, 2010; Penrose, 2000). Studies show critical differences between human-induced crises and technical-induced crises or natural disasters. Stakeholders usually attribute more responsibility to an organisation and react more negatively to human-induced incidents than to technical errors or natural disasters. If an incident could have been preventable, for instance through better management or safer systems, it receives generally more public criticism (Coombs, 2007c; Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993).

A crisis can cause intense emotional reactions in stakeholders and the public which can result in the rejection of the systems and structures which are seen as responsible for the crisis situation (Seeger et al., 2005). Stakeholder responses to a crisis situation can range from minor annoyance to boycotts and protests. The more an organisation is perceived as having caused or not averted a crisis incident, the more responsible it will be held by its stakeholders (Fediuk et al., 2010; Holladay, 2010). Figure 3 illustrates the process of stakeholders' crisis evaluation and the different factors which govern the stakeholder reactions. Pressure from angry stakeholders can create or intensify a crisis and destroy an organisation's reputation (Coombs, 2010c). A good or bad reputation depends on how well or how poorly an organisation meets expectations in the eyes of their stakeholders (Coombs, 2004).

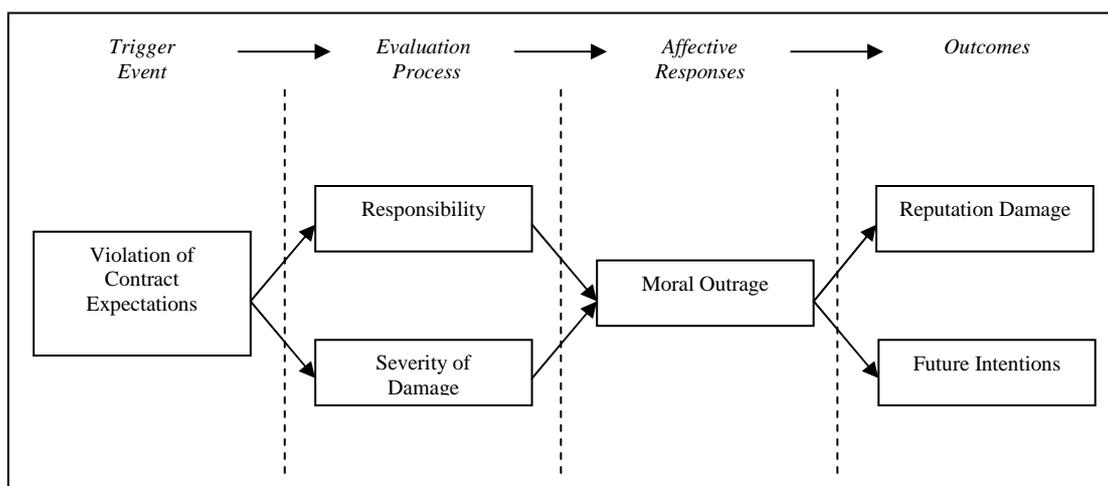


Figure 3: Crisis from a Receiver Perspective (Fediuk, Coombs, & Botero, 2010, p. 637)

One crisis which illustrates the greater attribution of blame for human-induced incidents rather well is the crisis event at the Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal, named after the location the “Bhopal crisis”. In 1984, 42 tons of highly toxic Methyl Isocyanate, used for the manufacturing of pesticide, accidentally escaped into the environment. Three-thousand people died, three-hundred-thousand were injured and six-hundred-thousand people had to be evacuated. The causes for the accident were identified as poor safety practices and neglected maintenance of the facilities. The damage

compensation costs for Union Carbide were estimated between \$ 350 million to \$ 4 billion and the incident is to this day seen as an extremely negative example of organisational crisis caused through neglect and carelessness (Shrivastava et al., 1988).

As a form of crisis preparation scholars suggest building communication relationships and alliances with internal and external stakeholders on an ongoing basis prior to a crisis. Organisations which have positive relationships with their stakeholders are more likely to survive a crisis less damaged (Pearson & Clair, 1998; Ulmer et al., 2007; Ulmer, 2001). Research shows that organisational stakeholders can be used as support groups for organisations in crisis (Ulmer, 2001; Ulmer et al., 2007). Organisations in a crisis should not just listen to stakeholders they agree with, but rather identify all potential stakeholders and establish processes to include all, even those the organisation does not agree with (Jaques, 2010).

One example of highly effective and positive crisis management is the Malden Mills case. A fire in 1995 destroyed the textile manufacturing plant in a small town in Massachusetts and put 3,000 employees out of work. The CEO and owner of Malden Mills, Aaron Feuerstein, responded quickly. Due to positive stakeholder relationships developed prior to the crisis and the already established strong communication channels, the crisis was efficiently communicated. The company got support from the community as well as from employees through the whole time of recovery. As a result of smart leadership, strong stakeholder relationships, and support networks, Aaron Feuerstein was able to resolve a crisis positively which could have had devastating effects on the organisation and its stakeholders (Ulmer, 2001).

Sturges (1994) observed that different types of information need to be communicated to stakeholders at different stages of a crisis. Information needs to be instructed, adjusted, and internalised. Scholars agree on the importance of understanding how stakeholders react to crises and how they process information in order to develop better targeted strategies and messages (Fediuk et al., 2010). Here again it shows that crisis communication is a difficult balancing act for the organisation, which has to decide what and how much information to give out to stakeholders and the public. For instance, a study by Coombs (1999) on human-error crisis showed the interesting result that increased

detailed and specific information about the incident led stakeholders to the assumption that the organisation could have prevented the crisis. It is important for organisations in crisis to communicate, but as Coombs' study shows, too much communication and information does not always improve the situation and sometimes strategic ambiguity in communication seems to be advisable.

Crisis communication research has contributed much to the understanding of how organisations communicate in a crisis situation. Nevertheless, most research is one-sided and focused on the standpoint of the organisation, institution, or person in crisis. Little research has been done on stakeholder perspectives and how stakeholders view and process information during a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Fediuk et al., 2010; Frandsen & Johansen, 2010; Kent, 2010). Key stakeholders such as media, investors, political groups, consumers, and citizens are often only included as the accusing party (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010). Academics observe that by focusing solely on the organisation suffering through crisis, research may overlook that the crisis for victims is maybe more of a crisis than it is for the managers of an organisation (Heath, 2010; Kent, 2010).

Ulmer (2001) stated that most research on crisis management illustrates that organisations often emphasize their own concerns over those of stakeholders and that "their communication is largely focused on legal concerns and typically results in denials of responsibility and lack of useful information to stakeholders" (p. 608). The organisation should, in Ulmer's opinion, attempt to see how crisis events affect their stakeholders and not focus only on stockholders. An organisation's first priority should be protecting its stakeholders from any types of negative effects, including physical, financial, and psychological harm; reputational and financial concerns should only have second priority (Coombs, 2007a; 2010a; Holladay, 2010).

Kent (2010) contributes an additional point by stating that most research deals with reputational or media communication issues, but not with the related internal or external stakeholder issues. The lone focus on the organisation ignores the fact that crises have broad implications on a variety of stakeholder groups. This deficit in crisis communication research implies that crisis tends to happen to organisations or key figures

rather than to ordinary people. Studies focus mostly on organisations facing a crisis and attribute too little importance on other affected parties that are in danger “...to suffer a managerial bias, because they consider the organisation as a ‘victim’ and perhaps even marginalise the true victims” (Heath, 2010, p.7). Although most crisis communication research suggests more stakeholder consideration is needed, most crisis research examines crisis only from one perspective (Kent, 2010).

Crisis communication research is meant to be applied; its research initially began in the practice and thus later encountered the interest of academics. As practice evolved, researchers tried to understand the processes and construct theoretical knowledge to improve it. Coombs (2010a) states that crisis communication is “a nexus of praxis where theory and application must intersect. Grandiose ideas or unattainable ideals are of little use. Theories and principles should help to improve crisis management rather than being academic exercises” (p. 22). Crisis communication as a research discipline has grown remarkably over the past decade, attested to by increasing numbers of publications on the topic. With crisis communication as an applied concept, research aims to use theories and models to solve real-world issues (Coombs, 2010b).

In summary, this review of the literature has identified three main gaps: first, the role of culture (national and organisational) in crisis management and communication; second, the applicability of strategies in different circumstances, industries or national environments; and finally, the lack of stakeholder perspective in crisis management and communication. An additional finding is, as the review indicates, a gap between the theoretical work of academics and the application of these findings in practice.

The variety of research done in crisis communication and management is, in Coombs’ (2007a) opinion, a good and bad thing at the same time. The fragmentations, due to the multidisciplinary nature of crisis and the examination of the phenomenon from very different perspectives, provide on one side very detailed and informative findings, on the other side make it really difficult to get the big picture. This research study is intended to examine crisis communication research in Australia and New Zealand in general and provide detailed information from a practitioner’s perspective to the sub-areas of cultural influence on crisis communication, stakeholder consideration and strategy applicability.

The following chapter will discuss the way in which the research design of the project is intended to respond to the gaps identified in the literature, including an outline of purpose and rationale, methodological approach and the methods of data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter will evaluate and discuss the selected research methods and illustrate the data collection methods and sources used in this research project. The discovered gaps in the literature will be investigated through two different research methods, aimed to contribute to answering the research questions. Finally the procedures for analysis of the results, limitations, and ethical considerations will be discussed.

Methodology

According to Collis and Hussey (2003) the purpose of research is “to review and synthesise existing knowledge, to investigate some existing situation or problem, to provide solutions to problems, ...to explain a new phenomenon, to generate new knowledge, or a combination of any of the above” (p. 2).

While choosing a methodology for the purpose of this research project, the nature of it and the key benefits of the different research methodologies had to be considered. Methodology is concerned with why, what, where, when, and how data are collected and analysed. The two main research paradigms, the positivistic and phenomenological paradigms, refer to the scientific practices and ways in which research can be conducted. More common terms refer to the positivistic paradigm as quantitative and to the phenomenological paradigm as qualitative (Bryman, 2008; Collis & Hussey, 2003; Reinard, 2001).

Methodological Considerations

The positivistic, quantitative approach descends from the natural sciences and sees reality as a concrete structure which is based on the assumption that “...social reality is independent of us and exists regardless of whether we are aware of it. The act of investigating reality has no effect on that reality” (Collis & Hussey, 2003, p. 52). Quantitative research entails the collection of numerical data, exhibits the relationship

between theory and research, and uses large samples to produce highly specific and precise data, which allow generalisation from the sample to the population (Bryman, 2008; Collis & Hussey, 2003). Measurement is an essential element of quantitative research. The establishment of reliability, which refers to the consistency of a measure of a concept and validity, which refers to the issue if a created indicator estimates a concept rightfully, are highly important for the assessment of the research quality. If reliability or validity is not given, the results will not be replicable. Criticism of the positivistic paradigm revolves around the question if a natural science model is appropriate for conducting social research. The assumption is that the reliance on procedures and instruments obstructs the connection between research and real life and creates a static view of social life (Bryman, 2008).

The phenomenological, qualitative approach became increasingly influential since the 1970s and sees reality as a projection of human imagination, based on the assumption that “social reality is within us, therefore the act of investigating reality has an effect on that reality” (Collis & Hussey, 2003, p. 53). The qualitative paradigm seeks to understand human behaviour from the participant’s own frame of reference and to create a “whole picture” rather than show single elements of it (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Piele, Rubin, & Rubin, 2005; Reinard, 2001). Qualitative research methods are concerned with generating theories and use small samples to produce rich and subjective data, which allows generalisation from one setting to another (Bryman, 2008; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Choice of Research Method

The choice of the research approach in this study was not only governed by the researcher’s personal philosophical preferences, but was also influenced by the sensitive nature of the research topic crisis communication and by the accessibility and type of data available. Crisis communication suggests negative incidents which have already happened or could happen at some point in the future. For instance, managers in organisations may not be willing to talk about the involvement of their organisation in a crisis, because it could put the organisation in a negative light.

The purpose of the proposed research project was to describe, decode and translate the phenomenon of crisis and crisis communication in an Australian and New Zealand context. A detailed assessment was necessary to be able to capture the complex processes of crisis and crisis communication and allow an overview of the area as well as the analysis of specific issues. A mixed-method approach, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, was selected in order to provide a broader, complementary picture of the subject and answer the research questions. The gathering of two kinds of data allowed the access to an advanced perspective of the examined area. The quantitative data collection permitted a general impression of crisis communication research in Australia and New Zealand, answering the five sub-questions about the number of publications, application of theories, methodological trends, types of crisis communication, theoretical frameworks, and methodological trends in case studies. The qualitative data allowed access to the perspectives and standpoints of practitioners working in the research area, answering the three research questions about cultural influence on crisis communication, applicability of crisis communication strategies in different circumstances, and stakeholder relevance or consideration in crisis communication. Additionally, the qualitative data collection method was used to get deeper insights into the work reality of public relations practitioners and the relevance of academic research for their work.

Qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed to complement each other, and by using both methods in the same project, more valuable information was obtained (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Reinard, 2001). The mixed-method approach was utilized to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon “crisis”, supply more depth and insights, and increase reliability and validity of the findings. The two main data collection methods employed were content analysis and in-depth interviews.

Data Collection

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a flexible quantitative research technique which can be applied for the analysis of documents and texts in printed or visual form. The content is quantified

in a systematic and replicable manner, using predetermined categories. The two main qualities of content analysis are that it is objective and systematic. The transparency of the procedures in assigning raw material into categories minimizes personal biases and the systematic application of rules in the analysing process ensures consistency. As a result, anyone employing the same sampling procedures and coding schemes should be able to replicate the results. According to Bryman (2008), the coding process is an important element of content analysis. To guarantee correct coding procedures, clear instructions, clarity about the unit of analysis, and categories which do not overlap and cover all the possibilities, have to be considered when designing a coding scheme. To identify difficulties and ensure coding reliability, inter-coder reliability (consistent coding between coders) and intra-coder reliability (consistent coding over time) should be tested upon the coding (Bryman, 2008).

The content analysis, as with all research techniques, has certain limitations. First, the documents utilised have to be assessed in terms of authenticity, credibility, and representativeness, as the content analysis is only as good as the sources used. Second, the focus placed in a content analysis can reflect what is measurable rather than what is theoretically significant or important (Bryman, 2008; Collis & Hussey, 2003).

Content Analysis Procedure

General information about crisis communication research conducted in Australia and New Zealand was acquired through a content analysis. Thirty-three articles on crisis communication, published in several mediums including academic and practice sources in Australia and New Zealand in the last ten years, were collected through an electronic database search using the keyword “crisis” as a subject term. The mediums included leading communication and public relations journals and websites such as the Australian Journal of Communication (AJC), the Communication Journal of New Zealand (CJNZ), the Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal (APPRJ), and the PRism journal. Additionally, case studies from the websites of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) and the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ), as well as conference papers from the

Australian and New Zealand Communication Association (ANZCA) were evaluated. The mediums were mirrored as much as possible for both countries, but the findings showed more available sources in Australia than New Zealand (as illustrated in table 3 and 4, p. 54/55). In order to gain access to the case studies on the websites of the Public Relations Institutes PRIA and PRINZ, the researcher had to sign up for a student membership and in addition seek for permission from the current chief executive officer (CEO)/executive director (ED).

Due to insufficient results of the article search in New Zealand's communication journal and the absence of an academic public relations journal, the database search had to be extended to a general database search. Data were collected via Ebsco, which includes the communication databases Academic Search Complete (6800 peer-reviewed journals), Business Source Complete (1300 journals), Communication and Mass Media Complete (440 journals), Computers and Applied Sciences Complete (2000 journals), Humanities International Complete (1200 journals), Political Science Complete (800 journals), Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection (400 journals), Religion and Philosophy Collection (300 journals), and SocINDEX with Full Text (820 journals), using the keyword "crisis" and "New Zealand#" or "Australia#" as subject terms to search for full text, peer reviewed articles. The wildcard "#" symbol was used to extend the search for variations of the search terms such as "Australian" or "New Zealand's". The extended database search also served the purpose of covering other possible publication areas such as business or management journals. Additionally, the initial time frame of five years, from 2005 to 2010, had to be extended for five years, from 2000 to 2010, in order to provide adequate results.

The 33 found articles, 27 in Australia and 6 in New Zealand, were used for evaluation and comparison with regard to frequency (numbers of articles published during the years), theories on crisis communication used, and research methods and orientation.

Interviews

In-depth interviews were used to explore specific issues in the area of crisis communication from the practitioners' point of view. The advantage of this method is its ability to obtain subjective information from participants and provide information regarding their feelings, values, attitudes, and beliefs (Stewart, 2002).

Qualitative interviews place more emphasis on the interviewee's standpoint in contrast to quantitative research, which rather reflects the researcher's concerns. Interviews are an often used instrument in qualitative research, expedient through their flexibility, although the interviews, transcription, and analysis are very time-consuming. According to Bryman (2008), participants' rambling or getting side-tracked is to be encouraged in qualitative interviews, as it gives insights into what the participants see as important or relevant. The interviewer can adjust to that and deviate from the interview guide (list of questions), ask new questions or follow up the interviewees' replies, although overall the same questions in similar wording are being asked in all interviews. Qualitative interviewing aims for rich and detailed answers which reflect the participant's opinion and frame of reference. In semi-structured interviews the interviewer uses a list of questions, but the interviewee has certain freedom in how to reply to them. In an investigation with clear focus and emphasis on specific issues, semi-structured interviews are most likely the method of choice (Bryman, 2008).

Interview Procedure

Six semi-structured in-depth-interviews with public relations practitioners in Australia and New Zealand have been performed to increase the understanding of cultural influences, the applicability of crisis communication strategies, and the consideration of stakeholders. Additional questions were asked to obtain insights into the crisis work area and the relevance of academic research in work reality. The interviewees were chosen through purposive sampling by their experience in crisis communication, their position (senior management level), and availability. The researcher was advised of the interview participants through contact persons at the New Zealand and Australian Public Relations Institutes PRINZ and PRIA. Each contact person recommended three members of PRINZ

and PRIA at senior management level and with experience in crisis communication. The membership at the Public Relations Institutes was seen as an indicator for increasing the validity of the findings, as the membership implies working within a certain code of ethics. An additional factor for the enhancement of validity was the choice of candidates at senior level, as work at that level requires a significant amount of work experience. Six interviewees, three in each country, were seen as an appropriate representation of public relations practitioners in both countries.

The interviews consisted of open and closed questions. Introducing questions were used to gain background information, whereas the open, semi-structured questions were used to explore issues in more depth and to discuss specific aspects of crisis communication. As questions such as “how does culture...” suggest the fact that culture de facto influences crisis communication, the interviewees were asked “does culture influence...” with the intention of getting their unaffected opinion instead. The interviewees were asked the same set of questions, although additional sub-questions (follow-up, specifying, probing, interpreting questions) were added. The interview schedule was also refined after the first interview with one of the participants in order to achieve clarification in the answers. The interview schedule was structured in five parts: background information, culture, strategy, stakeholders, and usefulness of academic research.

The interview questions, together with information about the project and a consent form, were sent out to the interview partners in May, two weeks in advance, to allow preparation for the interviews. The intention was to conduct all of the interviews in June; the planned duration for an interview was thirty to forty-five minutes. Although qualitative interviews are usually conducted face-to-face, the interviews with the three Australian participants were set up as telephone interviews, due to the physical distance. The interviews with the three New Zealand participants were also conducted by phone, as a result of the participants’ busy work schedule and convenience. The interviews were recorded with a recording device, afterwards transcribed, and a summary of the particular interview was sent to the interview partners for approval.

Data Analysis

Content Analysis

Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) study on crisis communication research was used as a guideline for the content-analysis. The two authors analysed research in two major, international public relations journals, the *Public Relations Review* and the *Journal of Public Relations Research* from 1975 to 2006. The same research questions, units, and coding categories were applied in order to establish and achieve comparable results to the international study and references to changes and trends in the last few years. Additionally, the same theoretical framework has been chosen as a foundation for the current research project with the purpose of indentifying possible cultural influences or differences within an Australian and New Zealand context. The replication signifies that the results of the international study, using the same methods, will be analysed in another context and applied to new situations. The results will strengthen the previous results if they are in favour with the findings, or they may be completely different in this research project. Nevertheless, the scope of the original study will be extended, which might also lead to an expansion and greater generalisability of the knowledge in this discipline.

The unit of analysis was one article that was examined by applying coding instruments which consisted of five categories. The categories coded for the variables of general frequency, theoretical application, review of methodology, research subjects, and review of case studies.

Variable 1 – Number of publications

The general frequency of crisis communication research articles in every source used per year was evaluated.

Variable 2 - Theoretical application

The theoretical application evaluated the articles in terms of theoretical orientation, the use of research questions or hypotheses and the theories used. In accordance to Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) study, articles were classified as

“theoretical” if they applied or mentioned specific theories, even if there was not an explicit theoretical linkage distinguishable. This distinction is important for the replication and generalisability of the study and the current research project. Among the “theoretical” articles the names of theories mentioned, if one or several, were counted. Articles were also surveyed for the use of research questions or hypotheses. Coding categories were structured into: no research questions or hypotheses, only research questions, only hypotheses, and both research questions and hypotheses.

Variable 3 – Review of methodology

The review of methodology analysed methodological approaches, the procedures and sources of data gathering, and the sampling methods. The general methodological approach, quantitative or qualitative, was defined by examination of the data selection and analysis method. Studies conducted by selection, analysis, and systematic quantification of data, using data collection methods such as experiments, survey, content analysis, or descriptive studies, were defined as quantitative. Studies conducted by selection and analysis of data using investigative data collection methods such as discourse analysis, content analysis, or in-depth-interviews were defined as qualitative. The data gathering procedures and sources, referring to the methods of data collection and data acquisition sources, were grouped in accordance to Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei’s (2010) study. Procedures were clustered into seven coding categories: experiment, survey, content analysis, qualitative content analysis, comprehensive literature review, in-depth interview, and multiple. Data gathering sources were classified into six coding categories: people, media (e.g., newspaper, websites), archival, reanalysis, literature, and mixed. Furthermore, the sampling method was evaluated and grouped into eight categories: simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratifying sampling, cluster sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling, census, and mixed.

Variable 4 – Research subjects

The research subjects investigated the research focus, crisis type and crisis issue of the articles. Research focus, which refers to the main topics or subjects of the crisis

communication articles, was classified into the following categories: examination of effects of crisis management strategies, evaluation of crisis incidents, building theories and models, review of definitions, functions and roles of crisis, examination of public relations managers' perceptions and preparedness, crisis and media use or relationships, suggestion of public relations managers' tactics or strategies, and crisis and education. Crisis types were grouped in nine coding categories: natural disaster, tampering/terror, workplace violence, technical error accident, technical error recall, human error accident, transgression, mixed, and general crisis type. The category crisis issues, which refers to the topic that a crisis is related to, was grouped into: business issue, political issue, health issue (e.g., food, pharmaceuticals), environmental issue (e.g., pollution, contamination), religious issue, racial issue, airline accident issue, space issue, mixed, and general.

Variable 5 – Case study

The case studies examined articles that selected a certain crisis in order to investigate its background and social context. The case studies were reviewed for the availability (or not) of three coding items: incorporation of the word case in title or abstracts, separate method section and crisis background section in accordance to Cutler's (2004) research on case studies.

After the creation of a coding sample, in accordance with Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) coding categories, the inter-coder reliability was tested and checked upon the completion of the coding. The researcher and a second analyst coded each a random sample of the same five articles (about 15%), the results were compared, differences in coding discussed and the coding strategy adjusted. The results of the content analysis were compared with each other, Australian results versus New Zealand results and with the international study of Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei. The purpose of the comparison was to identify possible similarities or differences in crisis communication research, cultural influences, and examine possible trends or changes in the last five to ten years.

Interviews

The six in-depth interviews with the public relations practitioners were audio-recorded and afterwards transcribed. Bryman (2008) points out that when transcribing an interview it is very important to reproduce exactly what the participant said. However, in spoken language interviewees seldom speak in fully formed, grammatically correct sentences, therefore the transcription had to be edited. To ensure that the paraphrasing of the interviews did not change the meaning of the spoken words, a transcription of the interview was sent to the participants for approval. The interviewees were free to make comments or changes where they thought it necessary.

The transcribed answers of all interviewees were copied into a table to give the researcher the possibility to group the replies of the Australian and New Zealand participants in order to categorise and compare them with each other. The results were sorted, summarised, and assembled in a comprehensible way with the intention to recognise trends and patterns, in the stated opinions, incidents and anecdotes, and make sense out of the data collection. The findings were compared and contrasted with each other and the research literature in order to discover similarities or differences, recognise patterns or relationships within, and make general discoveries about the phenomenon of crisis, crisis management, and crisis communication. The interpretation of data through comparative analysis was used to gain a better understanding of the research discipline. The literature review was consulted with the purpose of interpreting the data gained and giving it meaning in the right context. The findings were considered to be rich, subjective, but high in validity (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

Limitations

The findings of this study were subjected to certain limitations in both research methods.

Content Analysis Limitations

The content analysis was affected by limitations in mainly four areas.

First, the initial time frame of five years (2005 to 2010) for the content analysis of articles published on crisis communication had to be extended to ten years (2000 to 2010), as a result of insufficient findings. Additionally, the intended sources for examination had to be adjusted as well. The database search in certain communication and public relations journals had to be amplified to a general data base search. There was no academic public relations journal available in New Zealand and the Communication Journal of New Zealand, for instance, did not feature one article on crisis communication in the space of ten years.

Second, although the programs of the ANZCA conferences of the last ten years showed from 50 to 200 presentations per event, only a selection of the presentations were actually full text available on the ANZCA website.

Third, the website of New Zealand's Public Relation Institute (PRINZ) featured only award winning case studies. This fact does not provide any information about how many case studies on crisis communication have been submitted, as only the winners were published. In addition, four of the possible case studies were confidential and only a short summary available. The enquiry to get approval for use and access to the complete case studies was replied (and approval given) by two public relations consultancies, so two of the potential case studies could not be accessed or analysed. The website of the Australian Public Relations Institute (PRIA) offered a selection of online case studies in addition to the award winning studies.

Fourth, the content analysis itself proved to be problematic, as not every article with the subject "crisis" was concerned with crisis management or crisis communication. Some of the articles used a social, humanistic, journalistic, or psychological approach to the topic which discussed for instance, "crisis communication" with hostage-takers or framing of crisis in the media. Every article found had to be carefully assessed in terms of relevance, and in case of uncertainty, the references of the articles had to be checked for crisis management and crisis communication related literature. Some articles were published multiple times, for example, in two or three of the selected sources and had to be counted every single time, although it was the same article.

Interview Limitations

The interview limitations mostly originated in the nature of the busy public relations and communication profession. The interviews were subject to the participants busy work schedules, time pressure, unexpected business developments, and availability. The initial plan to conduct all the interviews in June could not be realised, appointments in general had to be negotiated with some tolerance in time and dates and in some cases postponed. One interview had to be conducted partly electronically (via email) and partly by phone, due to the interviewees' busy schedule. Ambiguities in the email reply and additional questions had to be discussed at a later date in a short telephone interview. Although telephone interviews are cost and time effective, they also have some disadvantages such as the inability to evaluate nonverbal behaviour. Two of the suggested Australian interview partners were not available anymore at the proposed interview date and replacements had to be found. The substitute interviewees were selected through a PRIA website consultancy search and the potential interview participants were contacted by email to enquire their interest in participation. Due to the unexpected drop out of participants, two of the interviews had to be conducted in July.

Ethics

As part of the research included human participation in form of interviews, the researcher had to submit a proposal for ethical approval to the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC).

The interview participants were assured of confidentiality; the participants themselves, their companies, or their clients were not by name mentioned or identified in this research project. The questions asked in the interview were about the participant's area of expertise in general and not about specific organisations or companies. Confidential or sensitive information was not asked or requested. Vulnerable people, minors, or ethnic groups were not involved as participants and there was no risk for harm or stress of an individual or group. The interview transcriptions will be securely stored at Unitec for five years.

The interviewees received the relevant information regarding the research project at least two weeks in advance to their interview participation. A consent form was signed by the interviewees in order to ensure clarity and agreement. Furthermore, the transcription of the particular interviews was sent to the participants for approval with the right to make changes or withdraw from the participation within two weeks after receiving the transcription.

An “Application Form A” was submitted and approved by UREC for the period of 28 April 2010 to 27 April 2011. UREC Registration Number: 2010-1071.

The following chapter discusses the findings of the content analysis and in-depth interviews in conjunction with the literature and previous studies undertaken in the area of crisis communication. The findings focus on general crisis communication practices in Australia and New Zealand and on the specific issues of culture, strategy applicability, and stakeholder consideration.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This chapter evaluates the findings of the content analysis and in-depth interviews. The findings are divided into the two different research methods and research areas. The content analysis provides the general overview over crisis communication research in Australia and New Zealand, while the in-depth interviews investigate cultural influences, strategy applicability, and stakeholder consideration. Additional questions asked in the interviews about usability of academic research in practice create the connection between theory and practice.

Content Analysis

The current research project covered research articles from four academic communication and public relations journals in Australia and New Zealand (Australian Journal of Communication, Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal, PRism journal, and Communication Journal of New Zealand), case studies from the websites of the Australia's and New Zealand's Public Relations Institutes (PRIA and PRINZ), conference papers from the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association (ANZCA), and research articles from a general database search with the keywords "crisis" and "Australia" or "New Zealand" in the time from 2000 to 2010.

The research sources in Australia and New Zealand were mirrored (Australian Journal of Communication – Communication Journal of New Zealand; PRIA website – PRINZ website; Australian articles presented at ANZCA conferences – New Zealand articles presented at ANZCA conferences; database search with Australia as source and subject - database search with New Zealand as source and subject. Two additional Australian research sources, the Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal and the PRism journal, were also contemplated as these are important public relations journals and corresponding mediums have not been found in New Zealand.

General trends (SRQ1)

Altogether 1616 articles were published in these eight mediums in the last ten years, 33 articles (2%) on crisis management and communication. Altogether 1,004 four articles altogether were published in Australia, 27 (2.7%) were on crisis management and communication; 612 articles were published in New Zealand, thereof 6 (1%) on crisis management and communication. The majority of the 33 crisis related articles were published in Australia (27 articles, 81.8%) and only a small fraction in New Zealand (6 articles, 18.2%). Overall, the results show that the majority of articles were published after 2004 (25 articles, 75.8%), although the results differ between the two countries. The results showed that the majority of articles in Australia were published after 2004 (23 articles [out of 27], 85.2%), whereas the majority of articles in New Zealand were published before 2004 (4 articles [out of 6], 66.7%).

Australia																								
Research Source	2000		2001		2002		2003		2004		2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		2010		2000-2010	
	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C
Australian Journal of Communication	27	0	18	0	22	0	25	0	27	0	23	1	19	0	21	1	20	0	25	0	7	1	234	3
Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal	23	0	16	2	6	0	4	0	14	0	7	2	17	4	11	0	10	0	9	0	--	--	117	8
PRIA	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2	2	--	--	5	1	3	1	25	0	--	--	35	4
ANZCA	--	--	12	0	27	0	49	0	50	1	38	1	45	1	35	0	67	1	78	0	--	--	401	4
PRism journal	--	--	--	--	--	--	7	0	9	0	12	0	20	1	6	0	6	0	19	0	18	1	97	2
Communication Database	4	0	--	--	3	0	11	0	10	1	9	1	3	0	6	2	23	1	43	1	8	0	120	6
Total per year	54	0	46	2	58	0	96	0	110	2	91	7	104	6	84	4	129	3	199	1	33	2	1004	27

(T = Total articles; C = Crisis management and communication articles)

Table 3: Overview Australian publications (Sub-Question 1)

New Zealand																								
Research Source	2000		2001		2002		2003		2004		2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		2010		2000-2010	
	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C	T	C
Communication Journal of New Zealand	3	0	5	0	3	0	5	0	9	0	4	0	3	0	9	0	5	0	7	0	--	--	53	0
PRINZ	14	2	12	1	14	0	15	1	17	0	8	0	19	0	9	0	13	0	16	0	--	--	137	4
ANZCA	--	--	12	0	27	0	49	0	50	0	38	0	45	0	35	0	67	0	78	0	--	--	401	0
Communication Database	--	--	--	--	1	0	--	--	1	0	1	0	3	0	1	0	1	0	13	2	--	--	21	2
Total	17	2	29	1	45	0	69	1	77	0	51	0	70	0	54	0	86	0	114	2	0	0	612	6

(T = Total articles; C = Crisis management and communication articles)

Table 4: Overview New Zealand publications (Sub-Question 1)

Most of the articles in Australia (in total and in relation to total publication of the particular journal and number of crisis management and communication articles in it) were published in the Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal (8 articles, 29.6%), followed by articles acquired through database search (6 articles, 22.2%). The articles located through database search were published in six different Australian journals, such as the Australian Journal of International Affairs, the Australian Journal of Public Administration, the Australian Economic Review, the Journal of Business Continuity and Emergency Planning, the International Journal of Policy, Administration and Institutions, and the Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management. The last five journals belong to the international publishing group Wiley-Blackwell, but were counted as Australian as first, Wiley-Blackwell publishes in Australia and second, the articles discussed Australian issues. The least articles were published in the PRism journal (2 articles, 7.4%). Figure 4 illustrates the publications in Australia in the last ten years.

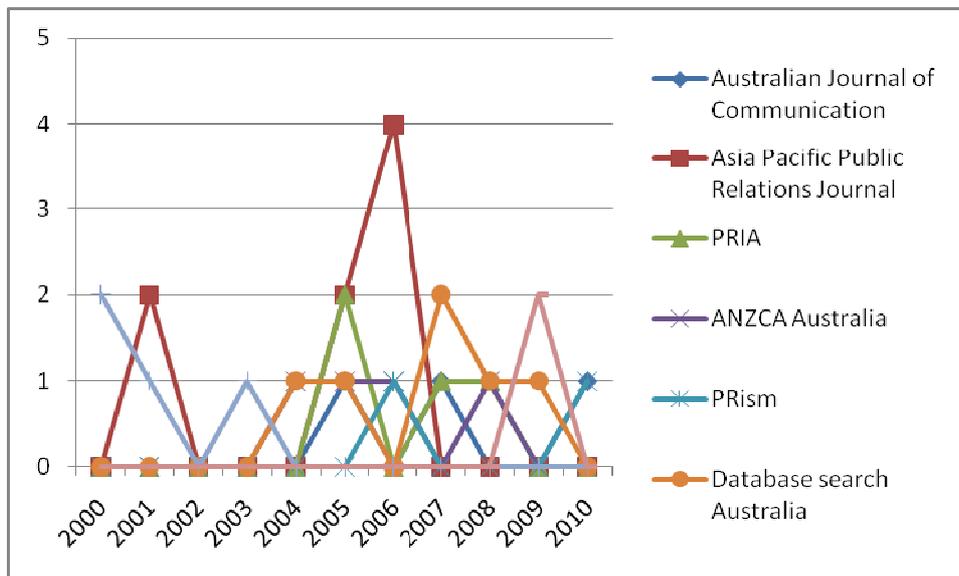


Figure 4: Number of Crisis Management and Communication Articles in the Australian Mediums from 2000 to 2010

The majority of articles in New Zealand were published on the PRINZ website (4 articles, 66.7%), followed by articles acquired through database search (2 articles, 33.3%). The articles obtained through the database search were published in two different journals: the Pharmaceutical Medicine New Zealand and the Pacific Journalism Review. The Communication Journal of New Zealand and the ANZCA website did not contain any articles on crisis management and communication, as figure 5 demonstrates. The equivalent to PRISM in New Zealand is PRaxis, but it does not have an online journal and was therefore not considered in this research project. Notably there was no academic public relations journal in New Zealand available.

A great many articles on crisis management and communication in New Zealand were published in non-academic magazines, such as New Zealand Marketing, New Zealand Management, and New Zealand Business. Although some of the articles were written by academics they were not usable for this research project as they were rather commentaries or general overviews over the area of crisis than research studies.

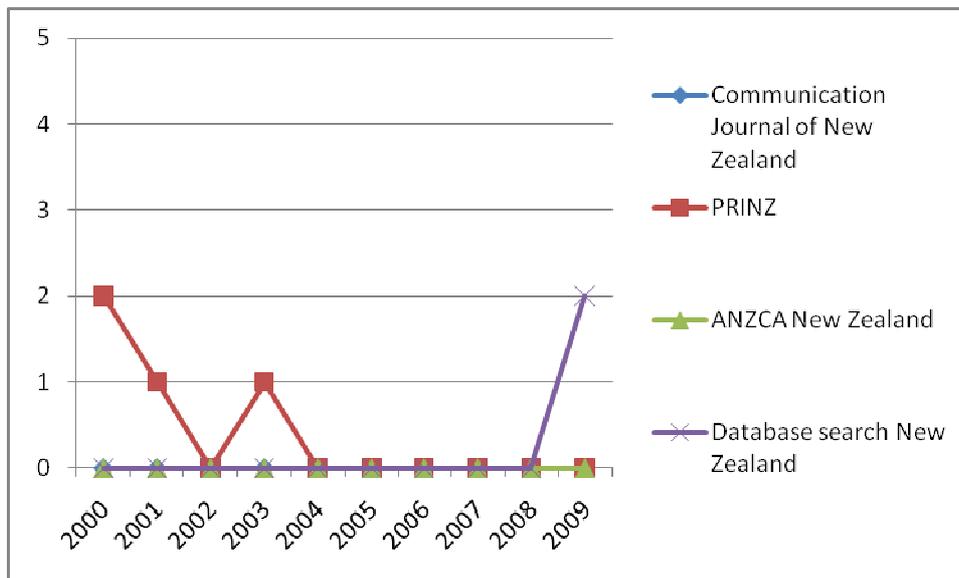


Figure 5: Number of Crisis Management and Communication Articles in the New Zealand Mediums from 2000 to 2010

When evaluating the numbers of published articles it has to be taken into consideration that not all of the selected mediums had publications over the whole period of ten years available. The PRISM journal, for instance, does not have any publications before 2003, whereas the Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal has volumes available for the whole ten year period. Furthermore, programs of ANZCA conferences showed an increasing number of presentations over the years, but only a fractional amount was published on the ANZCA website. Some journals, such as the Australian Journal of Communication, the Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal, and the Communication Journal of New Zealand have not all volumes online available, therefore the missing volumes had to be analysed in print form. Remarkably the screening of the print volumes produced more articles on risk communication than on crisis communication. Although crisis and risk communication have similar, related concepts, the search in this research project was restricted to articles on crisis communication.

The general database search provided another problem. The search was conducted in to variations with “crisis” as the subject and first, “New Zealand#” or “Australia#” as the source and second, “New Zealand#” or “Australia#” as the subject, using the

wildcard “#” symbol to include all variations of the search terms. The first variation was meant to get all the articles in Australian or New Zealand journals which include the terms in their names such as The Australian Journal of International Affairs. The second search variation was used to search for articles in journals which do not include the country names in their title. Both searches produced 185 Australian articles and 36 New Zealand articles. After removing the obviously not suitable articles, such as articles printed in international journals, editors’ notes, book reviews and the duplicates, 119 Australian articles and 23 New Zealand articles remained. These articles had to be screened for relevant research articles on crisis management and communication from a communications or public relations perspective.

Some of the findings were in a “grey” area, as the articles were only partly written from a communications or public relations perspective or contained a combination on risk and crisis communication.

To recheck the findings the same search was done again with “crisis management” or “crisis communication” as a subject instead of “crisis”. The search with “crisis communication” did not bring any results; the articles found with “crisis management” were cross-checked with the ones selected after the first search with the two different variations.

The focus of this research project was on articles published in Australia and New Zealand, so all the publicised articles were counted, even if they had an international author, as it occurred in three cases. One article was published in two of the selected mediums in the same year and was counted both times. The reverse search for “crisis” as a subject and “Australia” or “New Zealand” also produced a number of articles from Australian or New Zealand authors on crisis management and communication, alone or in corporation with international authors, published in other international journals such as the Public Relations Review or diverse Emerald journals.

Review of theoretical frameworks (SRQ2)

The findings showed that non-theoretical research was predominant in the last ten years with 19 (57.6%) non-theoretical studies to 14 (42.4%) theoretical studies. This is

mainly due to the inclusion of practitioners' research (8 articles, 24.2%), which was to 100 percent non-theoretical research. Theoretical research increased from 2006 on (all published articles in 2006 were coded as theoretical), whereas non-theoretical studies decreased from 2006 on. More than half of the Australian studies were theoretical (14 articles [out of 27], 51.9%), whereas all of the New Zealand studies (6 articles [out of 6], 100%) were coded as non-theoretical.

Regarding the use of research questions and hypotheses, there was no study found using hypotheses or research questions and hypothesis. Research studies not using research questions, hypotheses, or both were clearly prevailing (24 articles, 72.7%) in comparison to studies using research questions (9 articles, 27.3%). There were no studies found using research questions before 2005. Two thirds (18 articles [out of 27], 66.7%) of the Australian studies were not using research questions or hypothesis, whereas one third (9 articles, 33.3%) used research questions only. All of the New Zealand studies (6 articles [out of 6], 100%) did not use research questions or hypotheses.

With regard to the use of theories, the most often cited theory was Issue and Crisis Management Theory, as table 5 illustrates. The theory was used to evaluate crisis incidents and to examine the effects of strategies. Other theories frequently used were Organisational Theory and Situational Crisis Communication Theory. These theories were mostly used to examine the effects of strategies and the perceptions of public relations managers. Apology Theory, Attribution Theory, and Sense-Making Theory were also often used to evaluate effects of strategies, review definitions and crisis incidents, and for theory and model building. Theories only used once were categorised as "others" and included Agenda Setting and Framing, Chaos Theory, Discourse and Renewal Theory, Image Restoration Theory, Impression Management Theory, and Fink's Stages of Crisis. The naming of every theory was counted, and if an article had more than one theory, all theories were counted. As New Zealand's articles did not include the ones coded as "theoretical", all the Australian articles comprised the theories.

Names of Theories	N (%)
Issue & Crisis Management Theory	4 (17.4%)
Organisational Theory	3 (13.0%)
Situational Crisis Communication Theory	3 (13.0%)
Apology Theory	2 (8.7%)
Attribution Theory	2 (8.7%)
Sense-Making Theory	2 (8.7%)
Others	7 (30.4%)
Total	23 (100%)

Table 5: Theories Applied in Crisis Management and Communication Research

Methodological trends (SRQ3)

The research findings demonstrate that qualitative research is clearly leading in crisis management and communication research as more than two thirds of the articles were qualitative (27 articles, 81.8%). Quantitative research (4 articles, 12.1%) and mixed research using qualitative and quantitative components (2 articles, 6.1%) took up only a small part in the research published in Australia and New Zealand. In Australia, qualitative research captured the majority of articles (21 articles [out of 27], 77.7%) while in New Zealand all articles are qualitative (6 articles [out of 6], 100%).

As for data gathering procedures, a noticeably majority of studies used qualitative context analysis (13 articles, 39.4%), followed by multiple data gathering procedures (8 articles, 24.2%), and content analysis (6 articles, 18.2%) as table 6 illustrates. Far behind are the last two procedures, literature review (3 articles, 9.1%) and in-depth interview (3 articles, 9.1%). Data collection methods such as experiment or survey have not been used in the evaluated research articles. Collection methods such as focus group have been categorised as mixed, due to the fact that focus group data gathering includes interviews as well as observation.

Among all the sources of data collection, the mixed source (18 articles, 54.5%) was predominant which included, for instance, the use of interviews and media sources. Other data collection sources were media (9 articles, 27.3%), people (4 articles, 12.1%), and literature (2 articles, 6.1%).

Concerning the sampling methods, more than half of the articles (19 articles, 57.6%) did not provide the information. The most widely used sampling method was systematic sampling (6 articles, 18.1%), followed by purposive sampling (5 articles, 15.2%), and mixed sampling methods (3 articles, 9.1%). Overall, probabilistic and non-probabilistic methods were used in nearly equal measures.

Data gathering procedure	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Experiment	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Survey	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Content Analysis	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (28.6%)	2 (33.3%)	1 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (33.3%)	6 (18.2%)
Context Analysis	2 (100%)	1(33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)	3 (42.8%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (50.0%)	2 (66.7%)	1 (50.0%)	1 (33.3%)	13 (39.4%)
Literature Review	0 (0.0%)	1(33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)	1 (14.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (9.1%)
In-depth Interview	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (33.3%)	3 (9.1%)
Multiple	0 (0.0%)	1(33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (14.3%)	3 (50.0%)	1 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (24.2%)
Total	2 (100%)	3 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100%)	2 (100%)	7 (100%)	6 (100%)	4 (100%)	3 (100%)	2 (100%)	3 (100%)	33 (100%)

Table 6: Data Gathering Procedures in Crisis Management and Communication

Review of research orientation (SRQ4)

The research focus was found to be clearly on the evaluation of crisis incidents (17 articles, 51.5%), ensued by the examination of the effects of strategies (11 articles, 33.3%), review of definitions, functions and role of crisis (3 articles, 9.1%), building theories and models (1 article, 3%), and the examination of public relations managers' perceptions (1 article, 3%). The attribution of studies to the predetermined research orientation categories was sometimes difficult, as a study could evaluate a crisis incident as well as the effects of strategies. To ensure consistent coding the study was categorised in accordance to the majority proportions of the different focal points.

The overall result is also reflected in contemplation of studies in each of the countries. The main research focus in Australia was on the evaluation of crisis incidents

(12 articles [out of 27], 44.4%) and on the assessment of the effects of strategies (10 articles [out of 27], 37%), followed by the review of definitions, functions and role of crisis (3 articles [out of 27], 11.1%), the building of theories and models (1 article [out of 27], 3.7%), and the examination of public relations managers perceptions (1 article, 3.7%). Five of the New Zealand studies focused on the evaluation of crisis incidents (5 articles [out of 6], 83.3%) and one study on the effects of strategies (1 article [out of 6], 16.7%), supposedly due to the qualitative case study nature of the studies.

In terms of crisis types, the most frequently researched were general crisis (14 articles, 42.4%) such as the financial crisis, political issues, leadership and business issues not related to the predetermined categories, health threats to the public caused by flu, or climate change. Other crisis types regularly studied were mixed crisis (9 articles, 27.2%) such as the analysis of different crisis events (for instance corporate crisis cases in Australia); tampering or terror (5 articles, 15.2%) such as hostage-taking in Iraq and Lebanon or tampering of food and pharmaceutical products; natural disasters (2 articles, 6.1%) such as bushfires and floods; human error accidents (2 articles, 6.1%) such as negligence in airplane maintenance; and technical error (1 article, 3%), for example, contamination of products through equipment failure.

The most widely studied crisis issues were multiple crisis situations (8 articles, 24.2%); others (7 articles, 21.2%) such as questionable political decisions or airline groundings for different reasons; health risks (7 articles, 21.2%) to flu threats or contamination, tampering of pharmaceutical products; business related (6 articles, 18.2%) such as the closure of plants or product recalls; studies on general crisis situations (3 articles, 9.1%) and environmental issues (2 articles, 2%) such as bushfires.

Review of case study trends (SRQ5)

The research project demonstrated that case studies (21 articles, 63.6%) are noticeably predominant in comparison with non-case studies (12 articles, 36.4%) in crisis management and communication research. Altogether 16 case studies (76.2%) were published in Australia, 5 case studies (23.8%) were published in New Zealand. Among all these studies, only 4 case studies (19%) included “case” in their titles or abstracts, which is

a higher result than in Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) study (13.2%) or Cutler's (2004) study (13.8%).

The evaluated data showed that two thirds of the case studies (14 articles, 66.7%) did not name or mention theories. Only on third (7 articles, 33.3%) referred to theories (Attribution Theory, Issue & Crisis Management Theory, Sense-Making Theory, and Organisational Theory) and thereof 4 studies (19%) proposed research questions. Compared to non-case studies, the case studies used less research question or hypotheses (19% to 41.7%). The 5 case studies published in New Zealand were all non-theoretical (100%), whereas 7 of the 16 case studies published in Australia used or mentioned theories (43.8%).

Further assessment showed that case studies mostly used a qualitative methodological approach. Of all studies, 19 case studies (90.5%) used qualitative methods while 2 case studies (9.5%) used quantitative methods. Remarkably, the differences between case studies and non-case studies were not as notable as expected. Of the 12 non-case studies 8 (66.6%) used also qualitative methods, 2 (16.7%) used quantitative methods and 2 (16.7%) used qualitative and quantitative methods.

With regard to data gathering methods the case studies used mostly qualitative context analysis (11 articles, 52.4%), followed by multiple methods (6 articles, 28.6%) and content analysis (4 articles, 19%). The non-case studies showed a more evenly distributed picture in terms of data gathering methods, as 2 studies (16.7%) used context analysis, 2 content (16.7%) content analysis, 3 (25%) literature, 3 (25%) literature, and 2 (16.7%) multiple data collection methods.

The evaluation of the case studies in terms of method and background section showed that 13 studies (61.9%) had a separate method section and 14 studies (66.7%) included a separate background section. In terms of research orientations the focus was concentrated in two areas: 14 studies (66.7%) evaluated crisis incidents while 7 studies (33.3%) examined the effects of strategies. Again, the non-case studies show a more evenly distributed picture with 3 studies (25%) evaluating crisis incidents, 4 studies (33.3%) analysing the effects of strategies, 3 studies (25%) reviewing definitions,

1 study (8.3%) building theories and models, and 1 study (8.3%) assessing public relations managers' perceptions and preparedness.

The analysis of the practitioners' case studies published on the websites of PRIA and PRINZ showed that none of them included "case" in their title. In addition, the PRINZ website inclusively included award winning case studies, which does not provide any information about how many case studies on crisis have really been submitted. The PRIA website also provided two online case studies in addition to the award winning case studies. Nevertheless, the PRIA website provided published case studies for only four years of the ten year research frame (2005, 2007, 2008, and 2009). There are no findings for the missing years. Furthermore, the definition of which studies are related to crisis communication and management proved to be difficult, as crisis communication is a very broad area. As Fediuk, et al. (2010) point out, a crisis is experienced differently by different stakeholder groups and what is a crisis for one group does not have to be a crisis for another. In addition, the transitions between issue, crisis, and risk communication are often blurred and the researcher had to carefully assess the case studies and decide, taking the different crisis definitions and stakeholder groups into consideration, which of the published case studies fell into the crisis communication category.

The predominated categories used in Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) study did not exactly fit for the analysis of the practitioners research studies, as they always evaluated specific crisis incidents and examined the effects of the strategies used. As the main focus was on the crisis incident itself, the research focus was categorised as "evaluation of crisis incidents".

The websites of the Public Relations Institutes of Australia and New Zealand, PRIA and PRINZ, provided further information on crisis communication for their members. Five additional articles on crisis, issue and risk management and one PowerPoint presentation from the last annual conference were found on the PRIA website. The PRIA website also featured the PRIA Academic Database, which detailed academic's key areas of research and listed published articles. According to PRIA, this initiative is aimed at connecting the industry with leading academics to extend the knowledge of public relations. The PRINZ website contained two webinars on disaster and risk management,

one article on crisis communication, and three PowerPoint presentations from the last annual conference in May 2010. The additional material has not been used for this research project as the articles and presentations did not provide the necessary information to answer all the research questions.

Interviews

The six in-depth interviews were conducted with three Australian and three New Zealand public relations practitioners. The interview schedule was structured into five parts: background information, cultural influences on crisis communication, strategy applicability, stakeholder consideration, and use and usefulness of academic research.

Background information

The background section included questions about personal background such as years of work experience, international experience, number of crisis cases worked on, background information about the involved organisations in terms of existence of internal PR departments, pre-existing relationships with the organisations and their effects on the interviewees' work and the crisis communication strategy success, differences between general PR and crisis communication, and the interviewees' definition of crisis.

In the personal background section the interviewees were coded for country and interview dates in order to keep their names confidential as table 7 illustrates. The letters stand for the country of residency; A stands for Australia and NZ for New Zealand. The numbers 1 to 3 stand for the order of the interview dates, 1 for the first interview in that particular country and 3 for the last. Five of the interview candidates were male (A1, A3, NZ1, NZ2, and NZ3) and one was female (A2). Four of the interviewees had 30 or more years of public relations experience (A1, A2, NZ1, and NZ2), one had 25 years of experience (A3) and one had 14 years of experience (NZ3). Four of the interviewees were managing directors/director of their own consultancies (A2, NZ1, NZ2, and NZ3) and two were managing directors in big, multinational organisations (A1 and A3). Interviewee NZ1's company is also part of an international PR group. In five cases managing

director/director was the top-position in the company and in one case there was a CEO above the managing director position. Four of the interviewees have worked in other countries (A1, A2, A3, and NZ2); interviewee (A2) worked all over the world in her role as president of her PR company for South Asia and as a member of the international board. One of the interviewees (NZ1) worked on Australian campaigns from New Zealand and one of the interviewees (NZ3) has not worked in countries other than New Zealand. Two of the interviewees (A1 and A2) worked on an estimated 100 crisis cases, one (NZ2) on about 64, one (A3) on approximately 20, one (NZ1) on about 12, and one (NZ3) on about 8 cases.

All of the interviewees stated that actual crisis communication work only takes up a small percentage of their every day work average, as crises cases come in irregularly, but then take up all the time for a certain period of time in order to work through the crisis.

Country	Code	Gender	Years of work experience	Position	Countries worked in	Crisis Cases worked
Australia	A1	M	30	Managing Director	Australia, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Singapore, UK, and USA.	~ 100
	A2	F	30	Managing Director	Australia, Asia, and USA.	~ 100
	A3	M	25	Managing Director	Australia, Europe (from London), Japan, Singapore, South/East Asia, and UK.	~ 20
New Zealand	NZ1	M	30	Managing Director	New Zealand, involvement in Australian campaigns	~ 12
	NZ2	M	32	Managing Director	Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, and USA.	~ 64
	NZ3	M	14	Director	New Zealand	~ 8

(~ = approximately)

Table 7: Interviewees' Personal Backgrounds (Questions 1 to 3)

Pre-existing relationships with the companies

The interviewees were asked if they had pre-existing business associations with the companies which had contracted the public relations experts. This was asked to establish the relevance of familiarity to the work of practitioners as well as to success and outcome of crisis strategies.

Only two of the New Zealand interviewees (NZ1 and NZ3) had with more than 50 percent (NZ1, 75%; NZ3, 90%) of their customers pre-existing relationships. One of the New Zealand interviewees was unable to accurately recall any pre-existing relationships. The Australian interviewees (A1, A2, and A3) had pre-existing relationships with some of the organisations (less than 50%), but not with all of them.

Effects on practitioner's work or success of crisis strategy

With regard to effects on work or success of crisis strategies the practitioners were not consistent in their statements. Interviewees A1 and NZ3 stated that pre-existing knowledge and familiarity with an organisation absolutely can and will affect the success of crisis communication strategies. Decisions in crisis situations have to be made under great time pressure and speed is a key criterion in a crisis. Practitioners who know the organisation can make quicker, more informed decisions compared to externals with no knowledge about the organisation. Another interviewee (A3) added that it is certainly helpful to have key information about the main players, strengths and weaknesses of the organisation, and their current crisis preparedness. In contrast, the Australian and New Zealand interviewees A2 and NZ2 stated that it does not and should not matter, because a skilled crisis manager should have such a degree of expertise to be able to handle the situation successfully without pre-existing knowledge. Interviewee NZ2 made the following statement:

If you have pre-existing relationships it can be an advantage, but if you do not it should not matter, because as a PR professional you should be able to get all the necessary information in short time to provide the company with useful advice and solutions. The standard components of crisis management remain the same, providing that the CEO trusts you.

Reasons for consulting PR practitioners

When asked if the organisations had their own PR departments all the interviewees, except one, answered that some organisations had, but not all of them. One interviewee (NZ3) replied that all the companies which consulted him did not have their own PR departments.

All interviewees indicated that the in-house PR departments either did not have enough experience or lacked the skills necessary to deal with a crisis successfully and appropriately.

One of the interviewees (A3) pointed out that there are two main reasons for hiring a PR consultancy.

First, overflow - the need for additional capacity to cope with the crisis; second, expertise - a particular expertise which is not available in your own team.

Another interviewee (NZ1) added that in-house PR departments are:

... sometimes too close to the crisis, and they need someone who can stand back and take a wider view and perhaps come back with a fresh ideas in terms how to handle the crisis or resolve it. Even big companies (see BP) have sometimes to hire external experts although they have their own PR departments, but are in need for more expertise in crisis situations.

Differences between general PR and crisis communication

The main differences between general PR and crisis communication were mostly seen in the urgency of the situation. As one of the interviewees (A2) stated:

General PR is common sense day to day communication and stakeholder engagement. It is wise and important for companies to communicate, but the communication is not necessarily time-critical. Crisis communication on the other hand is high stakes communication and totally time-critical. It has to be rapid, it has to be effective in addressing community concerns, and it has to clearly state action the company is taking to address the problem, but the

main difference is the urgency of the need to communicate and the intense scrutiny to which the message will be subjected.

Another of the interviewees (A3) advanced the view that general PR and crisis communication are not initially exclusive from each other, rather an extension from one into another. All interviewees stated that although both are concerned with reputation, general PR is planned and structured and is not subject to the same conditions as crisis communication, which is a very specialised high pressure communication, often based on limited information. As one of the interviewees (NZ2) emphasized:

Crisis communication has to be seen much more seriously than general PR..., it is the tough end of the PR business.

Definitions of crisis

The definitions of “crisis” for all interviewees were reflective of general accepted definitions. They defined crises as unexpected events which pose a threat to an organisation’s business, product, reputation, and financial position. Interestingly, three of the interviewees (A1, A3, and NZ3) related their definitions only to an organisational crisis, whereas the other three interviewees (A2, NZ1, and NZ2) included individuals, structures, governments, businesses, and products in their definition.

Overuse of the term crisis

Current research states that public relations practitioners often question the use of the term crisis, as media tends to label all kinds of events as “crisis”. When asked what they think about the assumed overuse of the term, the interviewees mainly agreed that people often refer to incidents as crises, because they do not know the difference between a crisis and an issue. The interviewees established that issues have to be dealt with and have the potential to develop into a crisis, but people (especially the media) often seem to use the term crisis when it is in reality just an issue. Interviewee NZ1 explained that because of that potential, issues are often referred to as “creeping crisis”.

Interviewee A3 pointed out that while issues can become crises in the future if they are unmanaged, the term crisis includes more than that.

The term crisis is very specific and is used in a number of areas – from physical damage such as explosion or injury to reputational damage such as fraud, sexual harassment, or reputational damage caused by physical problems. A real crisis requires immediate response from the organisation in order to prevent significant reputational or financial damage; everything else is not a crisis, it is an issue.

Culture

The term culture in this research project includes national, regional as well as organisational culture and structure. The literature states that these factors can and will influence crisis communication. The culture section included questions about the effects of national and regional cultures on crisis communication, the effects of organisational culture and structure within private and public organisations, possible limitations of media and strategy use for small or medium-sized organisations, and crisis communication in different circumstances such as different crisis types or industries.

Effects of national and regional culture on crisis communication

The answers on the subject of the influence of national and regional culture on crisis communication ranged from “not at all” to “to some degree” to “absolutely”. One of the Australian interviewees (A1) pointed out that culture plays only a role in the tactical execution and implementation; it does not affect the core premises of managing a crisis. This statement was supported by another interviewee (NZ2) from New Zealand.

The principles of crisis and issue management remain the same in every country, because you always have to ask yourself the questions: What happened, who needs to know this, and it does not matter what country you are in.

With regard to crisis communication in different cultures, the Asian cultures were especially highlighted. Several interviewees (A2, A3, N2, and N3) stated that an Asian organisation in crisis would react differently from, for instance, an US organisation. Organisations in Asia are more reluctant to go public with problems, due to a

predominating culture of cover up and non-admission, which is, according to the interviewees, the complete opposite of what should be done in a crisis situation. Transparency appears not to be as highly valued as in Western countries, where most liberal democracies do not show any differences in terms of crisis. One of the Australian interviewees (A2) commented that the Asian unwillingness to communicate is mostly caused by the fear of “face loss”. Toyota’s recent serious brake problems were mentioned as a good example for this kind of behaviour.

The iconic and long-trusted Toyota brand took a global beating when the story broke in the media, in connection with alleged deaths and injuries caused by brake problems in Toyota vehicles. Media commentators and world community had the clear impression that Toyota executives had withheld vital information in the hope they could fix the brake problems, while keeping it “under the radar” and out of the media spotlight. This proved to be impossible, to the detriment of public trust in the brand.

Furthermore, the interviewees stated that culture does not only influence communication in their own country, it also plays an important role for internationally operating organisations with branches in host countries. The case of a particular Korean company in Australia, observed by one of the Australian interviewees, was seen as an interesting example of cultural influence, which directly related to business attitudes.

The Korean company had an issue developing in this market and they refused to acknowledge it. They insisted that the local management talks to the journalists to tell them to stop developing the story, because obviously in Korea they have a lot more control over the media. They did not understand the freedom of the press concept within Australia. Trying to manage the journalists only inflamed the situation more and made the journalists go harder on the story.

Another example revealed by one of the Australian interviewees concerned the case of an international gas company in Australia. Two employees were killed in an explosion and the crisis response was professionally managed by the local management and public relations team. Then the international headquarters became involved and sent

some American staff members to Australia to take control of the crisis management. Then events went very bad for the company. The Americans lacked the cultural understanding of how things are done in Australia, with regard to formal processes and procedures. They lost control of the crisis and the company credibility, even though the structure and the strategy approach was appropriate, but the application of the American crisis management did not work in Australia.

Interviewee NZ1 raised the point that culture not only influences crisis communication management, but also how publics react to crisis and crisis communication. He stated that Pacific Islanders, for instance, react to natural disasters such as floods, tsunamis, or hurricanes with a much more fatalistic attitude (“bad things happen, that’s life, just get on with it”), whereas it would be a huge shock in Western countries (“that could not/should not happen to me”). Another example was used with regard to the quite common occurrences of floods in New Zealand’s rural regions. People there, according to interviewee NZ1, react differently to these kinds of situations as they have a tough outlook, are used to sorting things out and handling these kinds of problems themselves. Interviewee NZ2 proposed that in terms of culture, communicators have to consider the audiences even in their own countries very carefully. In some countries, such as Australia or New Zealand, a high number of immigrants from all over the world results in a segmentation of different cultures and nationalities in one country. Due to different backgrounds, the different cultural groups might react differently to crisis communication strategies.

Effects of organisational culture and structure on crisis communication

All interviewees indicated that organisational culture and structure has a certain affect on crisis communication. The quotations regarding this issue ranged from “significant and the single biggest challenge that exists” to “it can have affects”. The answers also focused on different aspects of organisational culture and structure. An Australian interviewee (A1) perceived organisational culture and structure to be significantly important.

Organisational culture is one of the most critical things that can work for or against a company in a crisis. Structure can be a problem, particularly for multinationals where there is an extended line of communication. If a company's head office is overseas, in a different culture, in a different time zone, you can have the situation where the Australian management is impotent, because they cannot do anything before they get approval from their head office, which will not be awake for an X amount of hours. Suddenly the crisis is running and the company is not responding, because its structure is not suited to dealing with the crisis in real time in any particular geography.

Interviewee (A2) concentrated her reply on the legal form of a company and stated that publicly listed companies tend to communicate very swiftly, if there is going to be an impact on the share price, and generally respond more quickly than privately owned entities. Two of the interviewees (A3 and NZ3) highlighted the internal communication culture as an important aspect. The degree to which communication flows between organisational levels and units was seen as an indicator of how good a crisis could be prevented or handled. One example for the lack of communication between organisational units "gone bad" was the Ribena case, where important information was not forwarded to the management levels. Interviewee A3 pointed out that organisational culture and structure, as well as the management have to be taken into consideration.

How well an organisation is managed usually dictates how well they manage adverse situations. So if they are not well managed, if their communication is not very good, the departments do not cooperate particularly well, and there is requirement for a crisis to be managed across different areas and responsibilities, organisational culture and structure will definitely affect how well the crisis is managed.

Management and leadership were mentioned by several interviewees (A3, NZ1, and NZ2) and stressed as being very crucial and important factors in dealing with a crisis. One interviewee (NZ2) stated that everything starts at the top. In a crisis you have to:

...identify the person who owns the problem, which is normally the CEO. These people have to take the problem on, make necessary decisions, because you cannot delegate crisis management to the marketing manager.

Differences in crisis communication in government or corporate institutions

The specific structures of corporate and government organisations were scrutinised and the interviewees held different, sometimes opposing standpoints on the effects of these structures on crisis communication. With regard to government organisations the interviewees stated that the public sectors are driven by different factors and operate under a different set of rules. Dealing with governments in terms of crisis communication can prove to be difficult, as interviewee A1 pointed out.

The problem working with governments is that you can be dealing with bureaucracy, too many leaders, and political imperatives. You can have the leader of the department, a minister with his/her advisers, and a prime minister with his/ her advisers, so it is often more difficult compared to a corporation. With a government everything has to be discussed in several meetings, whereas with a corporation you can always go to the CEO and demand an immediate decision if the company's reputation is at risk.

Interviewees A2, A3, and NZ1 observed that governments seem to be more worried about media and political impacts, whereas corporations seem to be more worried about reputation, share-price, and customer relationships. The Interviewees A2 and NZ2 agreed with the opinion that crisis work itself is not different and the principles of crisis communication remain the same, only the work environment is different. Governments tend to be more in the media spotlight and incur a much more vocal opposition in times of crisis. Interviewee A2 pointed out that when governments are affected, the ministers take the centre stage and are often forced to resign, whereas corporate leaders generally retain the positions, or at least for longer. Interviewee NZ1, in contrast, held the view that although government representatives are concerned about future elections, they are most likely to keep their jobs, even if not the same position, whereas members of corporate organisations may not.

Crisis communication for corporate organisations can be difficult due to the fact that they are operating across cultural and geographical borders. Interviewee NZ3 pointed out that in corporate companies, in contrast to smaller organisations, more people are in the chain of command and have to give their agreement to decisions.

In smaller companies you can normally make decisions without having to get the consensus of fifty other people whereas in larger, global companies, such as BP, you may have to get the consensus from someone who might be overseas, in a different time zone, or who might be speaking in a different language. All these factors in a larger corporate environment impact on how a crisis might be responded to.

In addition, he stated, smaller, not stock exchange listed companies often operate under the media radar and thereby avoid negative media attention.

Limitations to strategy use in small or medium-sized organisations

With regard to the limitations for small or medium-sized organisations, the greatest limitation, which was mentioned by nearly all of the interviewees, was the lack of financial resources. Smaller companies often lack the necessary experience and the financial funds to hire PR professionals, but the crisis has still to be communicated and dealt with. They often do not have the systems in place to communicate effectively and do not have the time for full time crisis management as a larger organisation would. Interviewee A1 pointed out that they do not have the staff to prepare the messages, deal with key stakeholders, organise supporters, as well as manage the crisis. They bury themselves under dealing with the actual crisis and neglect all the surrounding issues and demands.

Using the example of a fire - they will work with the firemen on putting the fire out rather than deal with the bigger crisis of the media, the government, the people from the bureaucracy who will come to investigate the causes of the fire and safety breaches, and all this other issues. Frankly, they do not have the skills, the resources, the focus, and they are just not trained for it.

They will just work with the firemen and then wonder why they are out of business in a short time afterwards.

The interviewees did not see any limitations in strategy use for smaller organisations, as the principles and needs in smaller organisations and the ways in which crisis needs to be managed were exactly the same, only limited by financial resources. When asked if there were any limitations to media access for small companies, interviewee NZ3 replied that “everyone can pick up a telephone, but handling a crisis is more than the people themselves”. He stated that it is most important to know how to handle a crisis from a communications point of view, and crisis work requires highly specialised people. Interviewee A2, although in agreement with the statement that there are no media use limitations, pointed out that media probably would not be greatly interested in a small company unless the crisis involves many people. She stated that media are usually more interested in publicly listed, large organisations with high profiles.

Different circumstances – different crisis communication

All interviewees were asked if the circumstances surrounding a crisis influence crisis communication strategies. The literature suggests that the attribution of responsibility greatly depends on the circumstances of a crisis and the crisis type. The interviewees comprehended the same question in different ways and focused on diverse meanings and aspects of circumstances in their replies.

Interviewee NZ1 argued that circumstances such as the scale of the crisis can alter crisis communication quite significantly. Events which affect a lot of people, such as natural disasters, need a much broader communication in order to reach all affected audiences. Whereas internal organisational events such theft, fraud, harassment, which may affect only certain units of an organisation, have to be communicated on a smaller scale and people can mostly get on with their jobs. The New Zealand interviewee NZ3 added that if multiple stakeholder groups are affected, as for instance in the BP disaster, the event will be a lot more prominent in the global media. Interviewee A2 approached “circumstances” from another angle and looked at the incidents from a financial and management level. She stated that budget is an important circumstance for crisis

communication – if more money is available, more communication channels can be engaged, such as short videos filmed for YouTube or the other social media channels. Also the willingness of the CEO to take the leadership and front the company can change the situation in contrast to a situation where the CEO wants to maintain a low profile. Nevertheless, she argued, crises usually follow the same cycles or patterns and communicators apply the same processes and procedures. Interviewees A1, A3, and NZ2 were in agreement with the statement that the principles of crisis communication remain the same, no matter the circumstances. The main principles, according to interviewee A1, include more than reacting to the present crisis.

You have to define what the crisis is, what is the guiding line, the core objective, how do we as an organisation want to be viewed in one year, two years after the actual crisis is finished. That should be the guiding principles upon which every decision during the hot phase of the actual crisis should be made, so that we are not making quick and easy decisions now which will come back and hurt as later down the track. All the principles of managing crisis do not change, no matter what the circumstances. How you stand up and what you say, that changes, but not the principles of crisis management.

Worst type crisis scenario

As every crisis is seen as a potentially negative, harmful event, the interviewees were asked if there are some scenarios which may have more negative impact than others. Remarkably all the interviewees agreed with death as the worst scenario. The interviewees stated that death of employees, customers, or anybody involved in an organisation's operations caused by negligence, work place violence, or as a result of the company's actions are most difficult to deal with from a communications perspective. As a second scenario, interviewee A2 proposed serious environmental damage, as large-scale events such as the BP oil spill or the Exxon Valdez disaster stay in peoples' memories forever.

Strategy applicability

The strategy part section of the interview schedule included questions about usefulness of international strategies (which is again related to culture), usefulness of multinational headquarter strategies, differences in strategy use and usability between Australia and New Zealand, best practice approaches, and worst strategy approaches.

How do internationally successful strategies work in Australia or New Zealand

One of the gaps revealed in the literature is the question about usefulness and applicability of strategies in different cultures, circumstances and industries. The interviewees were asked about their standpoint on the usefulness of international successful strategies in their home countries. Five interviewees (A1, A2, NZ1, NZ2, and NZ3) agreed in the main that international strategies can be applied in Australia or New Zealand, although with restrictions. Three of the interviewees emphasised that the strategies would have to be adjusted to the national, local framework. One of the Australian experts (A3) stated that an international strategy could not be applied to any other country; it would always have to be tailored locally.

However, although the principles are similar, the local cultural sensitivity, the way things get done, what's expected, the values of society, they all need to be built into the response and that will vary locally.

An opposing view to the issue was held by interviewee A2, who was of the opinion that internationally successful strategies would work in Australia as well as elsewhere.

There may be some small cultural differences, but the process of good crisis management is pretty standard. Therefore a strategy which has worked in North America is very likely going to work in Australia, which is very likely going to work in New Zealand.

According to interviewee A1, there are examples which can internationally be shared and provide useful lessons. He pointed out that a lot of people confuse a strategy with a crisis plan and saw the need for clarification.

A strategy is how do we want to be seen post crisis, therefore, how are we going to manage this crisis here and now and over the next period of time to get to the desired outcome, where we are respected as an organisation, show that we stand by our customers, or suppliers, employees, and so forth. This is a strategy and that is where we come back to the structure approach in crisis management. Structure does not change and that is something that is internationally known. It is how you say it or who you say it with what becomes the local implementation.

Generally most of the interviewees did not see any real differences in strategy usability between Australia and New Zealand. Only small cultural nuances, better media access in New Zealand due to the country size, and more available media outlets in Australia were mentioned. Only one interviewee (NZ3) deviated from the general opinion by stating that a distinctly Australian approach would not work in New Zealand as media organisations, attitudes and opinions are different. When asked if crisis communication in Australia or New Zealand differs from other countries, the Australian interviewees clearly answered with “no”, whereas the New Zealand ones regarded differences in terms of the country size. They stated that crises in bigger countries are also bigger, as more people are involved and the different scale contributes to differences on an operational basis. In the “New Zealand village”, as one of the interviewees noted, journalists are usually known and personal relationships with the media can shape the way a crisis story is managed.

Multinational headquarter strategies – usability in Australia or New Zealand

Although the interviewees mostly agreed to the usefulness of internationally successful strategies in their home countries, they were more cautious answering the question if strategies created in multinational headquarters would work in Australian or New Zealand subsidiaries. They stated that these strategies can be a good guide and useful if enough flexibility for local tailoring with regard to market sensitivities is given.

Interviewee A3 saw the following problem with headquarter strategies:

A strategy developed in a headquarters ivory tower and then just given out for use is not going to work. If it is done in partnership with people and local markets, if it is Australia or somewhere else, then it is much more likely to be successful.

Another interviewee had a recent experience with a multinational company where they gave out their successful “tool kit” to the practitioners and they had to decide which of it to use in New Zealand. The outcome was that New Zealand required a much more personal approach. Because of the country size it was possible to contact and deal with media on much closer terms than in the original approach from the home organisation.

Best practice approach

In crisis communication literature some scholars discuss best practice approaches, whereas others argue that there is not enough research available showing which strategies works best in certain situations. The opinions of the interviewees also reflected a widespread view and a consideration of the issue from different angles. The interviewees A3 and NZ3 stated that every crisis is unique and has to be assessed and managed individually. Interviewee A1 added that there certainly is an overall approach, structure, or principles that work available, but every situation has to be analysed and the approach individualised. Interviewee NZ1 supported this standpoint with his statement that the “best practice approach” is usually a combination of strategies, depending on the type of crisis.

Where people are concerned it is different from product failure, where no one is harmed compared to, for example, the financial crisis where people have been harmed and lost their life savings. For me there is no “one best practice” approach, I always use a combination of strategies.

A slightly contrasting view was showed by interviewee NZ2 who made the following statement.

The core principles of crisis management and crisis communication apply in every situation. Get all the necessary information, find out who the key audiences are, and take the steps to inform every one properly. Say what

you are doing and how you are going to help. Be always quick, direct, honest, and open.

Worst strategy approach

After the interviewees established the best practice approaches or rather the lack of them, they were asked for the worst kind of behaviour or the worst kind of strategy in crisis situations. Notably they all agreed that the worst things to do are not to communicate, to deny that there is problem, and to not be honest. They all pointed out that if organisations close down their lines of communication, are slow to respond or acknowledge the crisis and just hope the crisis will go away, the media will get to know of the problem sooner or later. How organisations are presented in the media can make all the difference. As interviewee A3 pointed out, being slow and not telling people what is going on will reflect negatively upon the company.

Nowadays there is no time to react. In the old days there used to be one or two hours to react and work out what is going on before you went public, but this was before the Internet. Now you have to go public instantly.

Basically saying “I do not know and I tell you when I tell you” is not good enough. Even if you do not know very much, you have to communicate that fact and that you will be updating people as soon as possible. Not sharing information and not being transparent is the worst thing to do in crises.

The Australian interviewee A1 compared the denial strategy to having to jump off a cliff and trying to land on a small ledge.

You can jump and try to land on that little ledge 10 meters down or you can wait until you are pushed. If you decide to jump, you can choose the weather, you can choose the conditions, and you can decide how you jump. But if you stand there and deny and wait for someone to push, what are your chances for landing on that ledge? Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who react that way.

He added that next to denial, trying to shift the blame is one other really bad strategy. If an organisation tries to blame someone else, they put themselves into the media

spotlight as someone who does not accept the responsibility for its actions. The interviewee A1 emphasised that an organisation as the ultimate seller cannot blame someone else for their faulty products. A food producer, for instance, has the moral responsibility for the integrity of its products and the safety of its customers. Even if one of the suppliers provided contaminated ingredients, the food company cannot shift the blame. As the ultimate seller to the public it has the responsibility for the welfare and safety of its customers. Also some of the problems are not PR problems. Looking at the BP case, the interviewee stated, it is obvious that they do not have a PR problem, they have a construction and a physical crisis management problem. While the oil spill continues to be an issue, PR cannot white-wash their problems. Once they turn off the oil, then PR can help them to rebuild their image.

The interviewee NZ1 added another point by highlighting the damage which minimalist approaches can cause. Crises can get out of control if not enough resources are applied. CEO's think it is not necessary for them to get involved and delegate the issue to the lower levels where the staff does not have enough authority to make the hard decisions. The interviewee saw the minimalist approach, where the organisation does not want to spend too much money and just hopes the harm will not be too much as one of the worst strategies. Suddenly a situation can become a major problem rather than the minor one it was.

Stakeholder consideration

The importance of stakeholders is one of the main topics and repeatedly discussed in crisis management and crisis communication literature. However, nearly no research is available on crisis from the stakeholder perspective rather than the organisation's perspective. The stakeholder section of the interview schedule includes questions on the relevance of the stakeholder perspective in the practitioners' work, alongside differences in treatment and importance of different stakeholder groups.

Relevance of stakeholder perspective in every day work

The interviewees, when asked about the importance of the stakeholder perspective, were in agreement with each other and stated that the stakeholder perspective is absolutely vital, critically important, and the main focus of their work. Consensus was that research from the stakeholder perspective would be certainly very relevant in practice as it could be used as a useful instrument to measure the practical efforts of the crisis communicators, to find out which messages are most credible and trustworthy, and to show if people think the organisation and the crisis communicators have done enough. Furthermore, as interviewee A1 stated, it would be a way of allowing stakeholders to communicate and thus be of much use for the practitioners.

We would use this research to inform management decisions and to get to understand what stakeholders think. Shareholders or the management team might think something is the right answer to a problem, but there could be one or more of the key stakeholders saying that this is actually not the right answer and what they believe the company should be doing.

In addition, as interviewee A3 pointed out, stakeholder perspective research could be used to:

...improve our processes, to understand implications and the links between effective crisis management and other business indicators such as sales, share price, employee engagement, and the whole range of things. It would be very interesting, but often research in that area is not done as organisations are too busy fighting the issue.

Differentiation between internal and external stakeholders

Questions about the importance and the possible differentiation between internal and external stakeholders were responded to in various ways. Four of the interviewees (A1, A3, NZ2, and NZ3) perceived internal and external stakeholders as equally important, only their needs for information and the ways of communication were seen as different. Messages to internal stakeholders were phrased differently, including more relevant details and given out through different channels such as the company intranet. The messages to

external stakeholders were slightly adapted and given out through channels such as the media or the Internet. Although interviewee A1 pointed out that a crisis often lasts the longest for the employees, only interviewee NZ1 rated the internal stakeholders as the most important stakeholder group. He argued that the internal teams are the most important allies in a crisis. Organisations should make efforts to:

...get them on board, keep them informed and clarify their role in a crisis.
I've seen companies which said "get on with your every day work, we work through the crisis", but your team on board can be your best people out in the marketplace, saying "our company is doing a great job, we know what's happening and we are being kept up to date".

Rating of importance of stakeholder groups

To get an idea how practitioners assess the importance and relevance of the different stakeholder groups, the interviewees were asked to rate the significance of the organisation as well as internal stakeholders, external stakeholder, and others. The category others was not specified and the interviewees were asked to define who they think should be grouped in the category "other".

The selected scale comprised five points, from 1 as unimportant, to 2 as slightly important, 3 as important, 4 as very important, and 5 as critically important.

Country	Code	Organisation	Internal stakeholder	External Stakeholder	Other
Australia	A1	5	5	5	5
	A2	5	5	5	5
	A3	-	-	-	-
New Zealand	NZ1	4	5	4	3/4
	NZ2	5	5	5	5
	NZ3	5	4	4	3
Total	Ø	4.8	4.8	4.5	4.3

Table 8: Rating of Organisation and Stakeholder Groups (Question 23)

Interviewee A1 rated all stakeholder groups equally as critically important, defining others as media, government, and community. Interviewee A2 gave the same ratings, but did not think a category other was necessary, as every stakeholder group, other than internal stakeholder, could be counted as external stakeholders. She explained that, for instance, media is a channel to reach audiences, including external stakeholders as they have interest in the organisation and are eager observers and commentators. A3 did not rate the different groups with the explanation that the rating cannot be generalised as the prioritisation of stakeholders varies in every crisis situation. Media would be the most visible other stakeholder group, although most of the time employees and customers are most important. An earlier example from interviewee A3 can be used to clarify his statement. He explained that in an airline crash the main focus of the organisation is on the logistical necessities such as phone lines, information centres for relatives, although the directly affected groups would have the most importance. In a reputational crisis which does not involve physical harm, the organisation and the crisis experts would be spending more time managing media or stakeholders. Interviewee NZ1 saw internal stakeholders as critically important, whereas organisational and external stakeholders were rated as very important, others as important to very important. Others were defined as neighbours, relatives or friends, suppliers and customers. Depending on the crisis, interviewee NZ1 noted, media could also rate at 5 as critically important. Interviewee NZ2 rated all groups as critically important and defined others as media, politics, consumers, and suppliers. Interviewee NZ3 rated the organisation as the most and critically important, whereas internal and external stakeholders rated as very important, and others, in this case anyone who is not a stakeholder such as media and consumers, were rated as important.

Stakeholder reactions and check tools

To measure stakeholder reactions all of the interviewees used more or less the same tools, such as telephone or email. Interviewee A2 additionally pointed out the usefulness of online media and social media as a helpful gauge of opinion.

It is important to see what bloggers are saying, Twitter comments, and what is up on Facebook, because these are real people talking about a company

and it is happening live minute by minute. Monitoring of what people are saying or thinking about how the organisation is responding to the crisis is very important and something we take very seriously.

Most of the research on the crisis itself, if permitted and budgeted for by the client, was done a month to twelve months after the crisis to see if the community and stakeholder perceptions had returned to the pre-crisis level.

Usefulness of academic research

The academic research section includes questions to use and usefulness of academic research for practitioners, academic interest in practitioners, and the practitioners' opinions on demand for further research. To evaluate the so often stated "gap between practice and academia" and draw the bridge to the general information provided through the content analysis of published research, the interviewees were asked about the relevance of academic research in practice.

Relevance of academic research in practice

When asked about the importance of academic research, the answers ranged from "important, but not for every day work" to "very limited relevance". Although labelled as "terribly interesting" or "relevant, but not important" academic research was rather seen as a good foundation, but not as important as actual experience. It was remarked that the main shortcomings of academic research were that it is not done in the same speed as practitioners' issue or crisis research, and also often lacks real world insights. Research done by practitioners in the form of case studies was seen as the most specific and useful related to their area of work.

Some research states that practitioners rely rather on their own experiences than on academic research. When asked what they think about this statement, the interviewees' answers ranged from "I absolutely agree" to "that is a largely correct". All of the interviewees recognised this assertion as true to some degree. Interviewee A2 stated that:

One's own experience and the shared experiences of big profile crisis management case studies far outweigh academic research.

Additionally, as interviewee NZ2 noted, a big part of crisis work is instinct, and you often cannot teach instinct or acquire it through reading of academic studies. Furthermore, as interviewee NZ1 pointed out, experiencing a crisis in the real world is something entirely different, and it does not matter how much someone reads about crises, when “it comes to the real thing the textbooks do not matter”. Interviewee A3 supported this view through his observation that there is a deep suspicion in the practitioners’ community about how up-to-date academic research is within the very fast moving PR discipline. Although he stated that he uses a few academic models in his stakeholder engagement work, he emphasised that academic research has to be relevant to the quickly evolving discipline and academic research just does not show enough value for the consultancy work.

Academic research is often too general. The very nature of crisis is that every crisis is different, so principles have to be applied, but not models. You cannot apply a (academic) progressive linear model about how to manage a crisis in practice, because it will go completely of the rails or move differently to the way expected.

In contrast to the earlier statement that the PR discipline is quickly moving and advancing, interviewee NZ2 was of the view that his attained knowledge would be still up-to-date in a few years time.

I think even if I would not do any crises work for the next five years my knowledge, which I have acquired in my years of work experience, would still apply in five years time. What might change is the way in which I would have to distribute the messages.

The perceived disconnection between theory and practice is not really positive, as interviewee A1 and NZ3 agreed. They both thought that it is certainly important to stay up-to-date (one using in-house offers and the other training and course offers from PRINZ) and to keep themselves informed. Interviewee A1 explained his standpoint on why it is significant to stay current.

The easy thing to do is to rely on something that you might have done before and that worked, but it would not be the smart thing to do. You have to make sure it is also best practice nowadays.

He proposed that the combination of real world PR experience and academic research would produce the best and most useful results.

Academic interest in professionals

When asked how often academic researchers approached them as practitioners in order to gain the practice point of view for their research, the interviewees answered mainly with occasionally, meaning once or twice a year. One of the interviewees pointed out that his answer cannot be used for generalisation as there are many practitioners available and maybe academics just do not approach him.

Main sources for professional development

As academic work was not seen as an important source for information in the practice, the interviewees were asked about their main sources for information, further training and professional development. Three of the interviewees (A1, A2, and NZ2) named the newsletters and training courses provided by their public relations institutes as one valuable source for information. The members of the three international organisations (A1, A2, and NZ1) named their own organisation's research and training possibilities as a further information and development source. Interviewee A2 added Australian and international conferences and also business events to the listing. Interviewees NZ1 and NZ2 also used available online material. The interviewees NZ1 and NZ3 included networking and on the job experience as relevant and important sources.

Demand for further research

As the literature on crisis communication points out diverse gaps in research, the interviewees were also asked for their opinion on demand for further research in order to provide the practice perspective on the gaps. Two of the interviewees (NZ1 and NZ3) stated their interest in further research with regard to the usefulness of social media in

crisis communication. Interviewee NZ1 was additionally interested in research on the effectiveness of current mass communication in crisis and crisis framing in the media. Interviewee NZ3 mentioned environmental PR as a further area of interest. Two other interviewees (A1 and NZ2) were interested in further research in form of case studies, for instance, on the recent BP disaster. Interviewee NZ2 pointed out that “case studies are really effective and one of the best academic ways of reaching out to students and PR professionals”. They suggested that this ongoing research on crises could evaluate what went right or wrong or which communication strategies were successful and useful. Interviewee A2 stated that further research of stakeholder perceptions on the credibility of corporate messages during a crisis would be an important area for analysis. Interviewee A3 indicated his interest in more research in the non physical area of crisis such as reputational crisis in terms of ethics, behaviours, legal risks, fraud, the linkage between crisis and business outcomes, and the change in societal expectations. He stated that the shifting societal expectations mirrored with the expectations around businesses in reputational crisis situations are an area which is not well understood or researched.

Trends and changes in crisis communication

As a final question the interviewees were asked about their observations of trends and changes in crisis management and crisis communication in the last years. Interviewee A1 did not see any big changes or trends, as he was of the opinion that the fundamentals of crisis management and communication have been there for a while and just continue to get refined. The other five interviewees (A2, A3, NZ1, NZ2, and NZ3) recognised the impact of technology and the use of social media as the major changes. Social media are now accepted and required message channels. The speed of technology forces practitioners to work with the same speed and it makes it nearly impossible to contain crises or keep them from the public eye. Interviewee A3 stated the following about the impact of these changes on crisis communication.

Facebook, mobile telephones with photographic capability, and the ability to upload videos within minutes on YouTube means that there is no longer

control of all the content in the way it used to be. Therefore, very different approaches have to embrace transparency around information.

Interviewee A2 added a point by stating that another key change is the heightened expectations of governments and communities that organisations will communicate quickly in crisis situations. Companies are expected to accept the blame and spend money rectifying the damage they have caused. Interviewee NZ1 added that in his observation CEOs nowadays are much more willing to admit problems, give apologies, state that they have learned their lesson, and are willing to put it right.

The next chapter will discuss and analyse the findings of the content analysis and in-depth interviews by taking the current research literature into consideration.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS

This chapter focuses on the findings of the content analysis and the in-depth interviews in relation to the current literature. The findings in this chapter are also divided into the two categories of content analysis and interviews. The following discussion is based on the guiding research questions and sub-questions, which aimed to provide an overview of theory and practice and analyse specific aspects of crisis communication.

Content Analysis

The purpose of this research project was to investigate and identify the trends in crisis communication based on articles published in the main communications and public relations mediums in Australia and New Zealand from 2000 to 2010. The eight chosen mediums included four Australian sources (Australian Journal of Communication, Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal, PRism journal, and PRIA), two New Zealand sources (Communication Journal of New Zealand and PRINZ), and two shared sources (ANZCA and Communication Databases via Ebsco).

General trends

The results show that altogether 33 articles in seven mediums were published in Australia and New Zealand in the last ten years. The majority of the articles (25 articles, 75.8%) were published after 2004, although these findings differ in the two analysed countries. The articles were found in 11 different journals and 3 websites. The vast majority of articles (27 articles, 81.8%) were published in Australia, while the minority (6 articles, 18.2%) were published in New Zealand. While 23 articles in Australia were published after 2004, only two of the altogether 6 articles in New Zealand were published after 2004. Most of the articles in New Zealand were published in the years 2000 to 2003 (4 articles, 66.7%). The journal containing the most crisis management and communication articles was the Australian Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal (8 articles, 29.6%).

These results are similar to the findings of Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) study on crisis communication research articles in the Public Relations Review (PRR) and Journal of Public Relations Research (JPRR) from 1975 to 2006. Their research found altogether 74 articles and reported a significant growth in the number of articles after 2001, as more than half of the articles were published between 2001 and 2006 (43 articles, 58.1%). Most of their articles were published in the Public Relations Review (57 articles, 77%). They assumed that the growth in crisis communication research publications was also a signal for the research subjects becoming more diverse and covering various crisis situations.

Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) observation about the significant growth of published articles is supported in the Australian findings, but not in the New Zealand ones, as the publications there are decreasing. The analysis of the results demonstrates a scattering of crisis management and communication articles through a variety of journals and websites, covering a great diversity of topics. All eight articles found through the database search were published in different journals. Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's proposition that the subjects are becoming more diverse, covering various crisis situations, is supported and demonstrated in the variety of journals containing crisis articles. The diversity of the crisis communication research is not always advantageous, as Coombs (2010a) points out, as the wide dispersion makes it difficult for crisis managers to collect and put the different insights together in order to stay up-to-date with the latest developments. On the other hand, the dispersal of crisis communication articles in diverse journals could also mean that the information for crisis managers is being provided in their particular areas and journals. For instance, research articles on crisis management and communication in pharmaceutical journals provide the specific information for people working in this particular area. Seeing it from this perspective, the dispersion in specialised journals is beneficial, although in agreement with Coombs' (2010a) statement, for this reason it is difficult to get an overview over general developments in the crisis communication area.

New Zealand apparently lacks an academic public relations journal and only a small number of articles have been published in the country. The retrieved articles mostly

included research produced by practitioners (4 case studies, 66.7% versus 4 case studies by practitioners in Australia, 14.81%). One of the leading communication journals, the Communication Journal of New Zealand (CJNZ), did not contain any articles on crisis communication in the last ten years. The explanation for the lack of articles is given by the editor of the journal:

There have been no research papers submitted to CJNZ from New Zealand's academics. Although crisis management and crisis communication are disciplines taught in academic institutions, crisis planning is mainly undertaken by practitioners who are unlikely to submit research papers to academic journals (Prue Cruickshank).

This statement agrees with the findings in New Zealand which show that most of the articles are from practitioners. Most crisis communication articles published in New Zealand were published in non-academic, professional platforms such as the magazines New Zealand Marketing, New Zealand Business, or New Zealand Management.

The database search with “Australia” and “New Zealand” as a subject instead of a source, in contrast, showed quite a few articles from academic New Zealand authors published in international journals. This leads to the conclusion that there is academic activity in terms of crisis management and communication in New Zealand, only authors seem to choose to publish outside the country. This fact could be attributed to the lack of public relations journals in the country or to the higher profile of the international journals. A comparison of the publication numbers showed that there were nearly five times more articles (27 versus 6) published in Australia, which also reflects the relation of population figures of Australia and New Zealand (~21.300.000 versus ~ 4.200.000), and the relation of universities (39 versus 8). The elevated number of publications could also be due to the fact that Australia has a specific public relations journal with the Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal, which also held the most crisis communication publications.

An additional interesting finding was also the high number of articles on risk communication, which was in some mediums higher than the number of crisis communication articles. This could be seen as an indication in the increasing interest in risk communication or, as Coombs (2010c) pointed out, an increasing interest in crisis

communication which has begun to reveal its close connection to allied fields such as risk communication.

A general observation in the current research project was also a merging of risk, crisis, and disaster communication, often in the non-theoretical articles. This finding supports Falkenheimer and Heide's (2006) statement that the crisis communication research field is "dominated by empirical case studies, often neglecting the transgressing boundaries between risk and crisis communication" (p. 180).

Review of theoretical frameworks

The review of theoretical frameworks showed that non-theoretical research was slightly predominant with 19 non-theoretical studies (57.6%) to 14 theoretical studies (42.4%). This result is mainly owed to the inclusion of practitioners work (8 non-theoretical studies, 24.2%). The theoretical research increased from 2006 on; all studies were coded as theoretical. More than half of the Australian studies proved to be theoretical (14 articles, 51.9%), while none of the New Zealand studies were coded thus. Notably none of the evaluated studies used hypotheses or a combination of hypothesis and research questions. Studies using no research questions were clearly dominant (24 articles, 72.7%) to studies using research questions (9 articles, 27.3%) and former were not found before 2005. Two thirds of the Australian studies did not use research questions as did none of New Zealand studies.

The high number of non-theoretical research studies opposes Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) findings which showed an increase of theoretical research and a decrease of non-theoretical studies. Remarkably, the results match in 2006, where both research projects reported that all published articles were coded as theoretical. The evaluation of the articles in 2006, analysed in this research project, could not find any similarities or connections between the articles or any major crisis events which could have served as a possible explanation for the coincidence. The findings with regard to the use of research questions, hypotheses, or both, are in line with Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's findings. Both research projects showed an increase of research questions over the years. Nevertheless, the articles using no research questions or hypotheses are dominant. The discovery that

none of the studies used research questions before 2005 indicates an increase in theoretical studies after 2005. The dominance of non-theoretical studies using no research questions or hypotheses is obviously related to the addition of practitioners' studies in this research project, which make a significant difference due to the high percentage (one quarter of all studies) in the overall articles. As established before, none of the studies published in New Zealand used or mentioned theories or research questions or hypotheses.

The previous results showed an increase in theoretical applications in both research projects, particularly in recent years. The theories used more than once in both studies were similar, although with differences in ranking. Among the articles coded as theoretical, theories frequently cited were Issue and Crisis Management Theory, Situational Crisis Communication Theory, Organisational Theory, Apology Theory, and Attribution Theory. The present research project counted altogether 23 references to theories while Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei (2010) counted 70 references. Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei pointed out that these theories may have offered useful references for the evaluation of crisis incidents and analysis of communication strategies, but with the crisis communication discipline becoming more and more diverse, scholars may have to review a broader range of theories in order to gain new insights. The results demonstrate that scholars, when using a theoretical approach, use more or less the same theories to explain and analyse the different aspects of crisis. Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's suggestion to extend the range of theories may reveal new features of crisis management and communication by looking at the phenomenon through a different lens. However, it could also add to the existing complexity in this research area.

Methodological trends

The analysis of methodological trends in this research project demonstrated a noticeable dominance of qualitative research in crisis communication in Australia and New Zealand. More than two thirds of all studies (81.8%) used qualitative methods, in New Zealand even all of the studies. These findings are significantly different in comparison to Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) international study, where qualitative research was only

slightly predominant (38 articles, 51.4%). This result is again, influenced by the consideration of purely qualitative practitioner studies in this research project.

The results of both investigations in terms of data gathering methods show some similarities with qualitative context analysis being the most used method. Interestingly, the international study reported experiment and survey as the second and third most often used methods, whereas the present research project reported no use of these two data collection methods at all. The articles in Australia and New Zealand showed a rather high use of multiple data gathering procedures and content analysis, followed by a small percentage of literature reviews and in-depth interviews. While researchers in the international publications used people as a main source for data collection, researchers published in Australia and New Zealand used rather mixed sources, such as literature and media. Beside these differences the sources of data collection and their ranking were nearly identical. In both studies more than half of the articles provided the sampling method. Purposive sampling was used mostly in the international study, whereas systematic sampling, followed by purposive sampling was used in Australia. The sampling method in all New Zealand studies was not available. While researchers in Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) study mostly used non-probabilistic methods, the researchers in the Australian publications used probabilistic and non-probabilistic methods in nearly equal measures.

One explanation for the high use of experiment and survey as data collection methods and people as the main source for data collection in Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) international study is that a lot of studies in the USA use students for their research. Students in undergraduate courses can earn credits for their partaking in research projects, which contributes to a high number of participating students. This regulation guarantees an easy access to participants for researchers, whereas Australian or New Zealand researchers have not these kinds of possibilities and have to resort to other methods. This regulation is an advantage for international researchers as well as a limitation at the same time, as experiments or surveys with students often do not reflect real world attitudes or circumstances. As Coombs (2004) pointed out, experimental studies are always limited to some extent by the variables and respondents used.

Review of research orientation

The review of the research orientation shows an obvious focus on the evaluation of crisis incidents, followed by the evaluation of effects of strategies. Other research focuses such as review of definitions, functions and role of crisis, building of theories, and the examination of public relations managers' perceptions were by far less often found. This finding is reflected in both countries, as 44.4 percent of the Australian and 83.3 percent of the New Zealand studies evaluated crisis incidents, and 37 percent of the Australian and 16.7 percent of the New Zealand studies examined the effects of strategies. These results are similar to Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) findings, where nearly half of the studies evaluated crisis incidents, followed by the examinations of effects of strategies. The study reported that after 2000 the research topics became more diverse, whereas in earlier years studies focused more on theories and models as well as evaluation of crisis incidents.

The analysis of crisis types shows a clear favour for the analysis of general crisis (42.4%), followed by mixed crisis (27.2%). Tampering or terror, natural disasters, human error accidents, and technical error were also examined, but play only a minor role in comparison with the first two types. Interestingly the New Zealand publications only evaluated general crisis (83.3%) and mixed crisis (16.7%). These results differ significantly with the findings from the international study which showed technical error accidents, human error accidents, transgressions and illegal behaviours inside organisations and technical failures as the most frequently studied crisis types. In the present research project most of the publications analysed specific Australian or New Zealand issues. The findings could suggest that the crisis types in both countries differ from other countries such as the USA. However, as definitions of crisis explain, crisis are unexpected, often unpredictable events which can befall any organisation or individual (Coombs, 2009; Sapriel, 2003; Ulmer et al., 2007). Therefore the analysed publications could also just reflect issues which happened to be of interest at that specific time, which do not have any relevance regarding the overall results or provide any information for future predictions. Some of the mentioned crisis types could be ranked as particularly "Australian" or "New Zealand" issues, such as bushfires, or cultural issues regarding Maori, as these kinds of

incidents are prone to happen in these two countries. Airline crashes or organisational crisis caused by illegal behaviour, on the other hand, can take place in every country.

In terms of crisis issues, multiple crisis situations, others (business problems or political problems), health risks (tampering or disease threats), business related problems, studies of general crisis, and environmental issues were most often studied in Australia and New Zealand. In contrast, Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) study showed a different ranking with general issues taking up the first place, followed by business related issues, environmental issues, health risks, and other issues. Studies on other issues such as crisis involving NASA can be seen as typical US issues, although such crises could also befall other international space programs at any time. As explained in the consideration of crisis types, the crisis issues also reflect the problems and interests at a specific time without allowing too much interpretation with regard to susceptibility for a certain type of crisis in a specific country.

Review of case study trends

The results of the present research project showed a clear dominance of case studies with more than 60 percent of the overall studies. Altogether 76.2 percent of the studies were published in Australia, 23.8 percent in New Zealand. This finding is slightly higher than in Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) study with 51.4 percent case studies. Cutler (2004) stated that case studies comprise about a third of published articles in the public relations literature, an observation which is obviously surpassed in the current research project.

Among all these studies in the current research project, only 4 case studies (19%) included "case" in their titles or abstracts. This is again a higher result than in Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) study (13.2%), or Cutler's (2004) study (13.8%) on case studies published in PRR from 1995 to 1999. The evaluation of the case studies in the present research project also showed that more than half of the case studies (61.9% and 66.7%) included a separate method and background section. This result is closer to Cutler's findings, which reported that 45 percent of the case studies had a separate method

section than to Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's study, which found 23.3 percent with method sections, though 97.4 percent of their studies had separate background sections.

The review of the case studies showed also a clear trend to non-theoretical case studies (66.7%). Only one third (33.3%) referred to theories and even a smaller percentage (19%) used research questions. Nearly half (43.8%) of the Australian case studies mentioned theories, whereas all of the New Zealand studies were non-theoretical. These results deviate considerably from the international studies of Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei (2010) and Cutler (2004), where the majority of case studies (71.7% and 66%) mentioned or used theories. Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei found that case studies, compared to non-case studies, were less likely to use research questions or hypothesis. This finding is also mirrored in the current research project. The high percentage of non-theoretical case studies is again mostly due to the involvement of practitioners' case studies (38.1%), which did not use or mention any theories as the studies are highly practice orientated. The results support Coombs (2007d) and Falkenheimer and Heide's (2006) observations, which stated that the crisis communication field is dominated by case studies, lacking systematic knowledge and theory-based framework analysis.

In terms of methodological approaches the assessment illustrated a strongly qualitative focus, as over 90 percent of the case studies used qualitative methods as well as most of the non-case studies (66.6%). The most popular data collection method was predominantly qualitative context analysis (52.4%), followed by multiple methods (28.6%), and content analysis (19%). The analysis of the non-case studies revealed a more equally distributed use of data collection methods, except experiment and survey, which were not used at all. Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei (2010) reported in their study that while most of the case studies used the qualitative approach (76.3%), non-case studies were more likely to use the quantitative approach (72.2%). Frequently used data gathering procedures were qualitative context analysis (71.7%) and content analysis (10.5%), while non-case studies used mostly experiments (33.3%), surveys (22.2%), literature review (22.2%), and content analysis (16.7%). This finding demonstrates that qualitative approaches seem to be more dominant in Australia and New Zealand as they are internationally. This again could

be due to the different regulations regarding student participations as previously mentioned in the analysis.

With regard to research orientations, the focus was clearly on the evaluation of crisis (66.7%) and the examination of the effects of strategies (33.3%). In comparison, the non-case studies showed a more evenly distributed concentration on all available categories, except suggestion of tactics or strategies. Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei (2010) reported similar findings with an evident concentration on the evaluation of crisis incidents in case studies (82.4%) and the focus on several research subjects in non-case studies.

The domination of case studies in the field of crisis communication is often seen critically by scholars, as they state that crisis management is in need of more evidence-base research (Coombs, 2007c) which allows for generalisation and not just snapshots of time and organisational behaviour (Fediuk et al., 2010) in order to further understanding of crisis communication.

Interviews

The aim of this research project was to evaluate specific issues in crisis communication, using in-depth interviews to gain an understanding of cultural influences, strategy applicability, stakeholder consideration, and practice relevance of academic research. The interviews were conducted with three Australian and three New Zealand participants.

Background information

Falkenheimer and Heide (2006) state that "... public relations show its main value when organisations face risks, uncertainty, or suffer from crisis" and that "risk and crisis communication is the core of public relations practice and theory" (p. 181).

The results obtained during the first part of the interview indicate that crisis management and crisis communication are very specific areas of work and set apart in many aspects from general public relations work. As Hale et al. (2005) highlight, crisis

communication happens in a unique environment due to the immediate risk of significant loss, time pressure, and stress.

The main differences between crisis communication and general PR are apparently in the urgency and necessity to communicate in a crisis situation. Crisis communication was defined as serious, time-critical, high stakes communication on which the reputation, finances, and often the entire survival of an organisation depend. General PR was seen as long-term planned and structured, related to marketing and promotion work and defined as “common sense day to day communication and stakeholder engagement” (A2).

Crisis definition and overuse

A notable finding of the research showed that, although the interviewees used more or less the textbook definitions of crisis, half of the interviewees related their definitions only to organisations, whereas the other three related them as well to individuals, structures, and governments. The focus being mainly on the organisation is one of the gaps discovered in the literature which states that most crisis definitions only relate to organisations (Kent, 2010).

Crises usually rouse great media attention, as negative events are often more interesting and newsworthy (Ashcroft, 1997, Heath, 2010). Coombs (2010a) explained this phenomenon by stating “It is this anomalous dimension of crisis that draws attention of the media and other stakeholders. Crises are unusual negative events, so humans are drawn to them just like people on the highway gawk at accidents” (p. 20).

Research evaluating crises stated that the term crisis is often used for events which do not justify that. Academic definitions use the term crisis for serious events with high damage potential (Coombs, 2010a), but Ulmer et al. (2010) observed that although the expression describes bad experiences and difficult times, not all of them are actually crises. Apparently the term crisis is often used to get widespread attention (Seeger et al., 2005). The interviewees were in accordance with this conclusion and stated that often incidents, although labelled “crisis”, are in reality other issues. The interviewees distinguished clearly between issues and crisis and observed that people often mean issues

when they talk about crisis. A real crisis “requires immediate response from the organisation in order to prevent significant reputational or financial damage” (A3), everything else is an issue. The confusion between the terms becomes clear by evaluating the mutual relationship between issues and crisis. Issues are problems which can, if unattended, develop into crises (Ashcroft, 1997; Coombs, 2010c; Heath, 2010) and crises always create issues (Coombs, 2010c).

The reasons for consulting PR professionals were seen in the need for additional capacity, particular expertise in the crisis management and communication area, as well as in the need for a more objective, outside view of the situation. Additional comments regarded crises in big global companies, such as BP, which arouse the exorbitant interest of the global media and necessitate additional staff and crisis expertise, although large organisations usually have very well established communications departments and generally would handle the crisis themselves.

Effects of pre-existing relationships on success of crisis strategies and practitioner’s work

A central phase within crisis management is crisis communication, which is supposed to be quick, consistent, and open (Falkenheimer & Heide, 2010). One result of the interview questions was that only two of the interviewees (NZ1 and NZ2) had pre-existing business associations with more than 50 percent (75% and 90%) of their crisis clients. Interestingly, both participants were from New Zealand, had not worked in other countries and had worked on the fewest crisis cases (12 and 8) in comparison with the other participants. This leads to the assumption that first, practitioners in New Zealand seem to have ongoing business relationships with their clients more often and second, there are fewer crisis incidents in New Zealand. Both assumptions could be related to the country size. The low percentage of pre-existing business associations of the other practitioners draws the conclusion that organisations usually handle their communication on their own. Crisis is such a specific circumstance and out of the daily routine that even if there is an in-house PR department available, organisations frequently enlist the assistance of external experts. Sterne (2008) asserted that organisations often do not see the need for communication staff except if they need advice in government relations, health issues, or

in times of crisis. The low percentage of pre-existing business associations with crisis clients confirms this assertion.

The presumed difficulties in handling a crisis for an organisation without previous knowledge about the organisation and its market were only partly confirmed. Familiarity with the organisation in crisis can have affects on the practitioners work and the success of the crisis strategies, but it does not have to. The interviewees had dissimilar opinions on the degrees of influence. The agreeing interviewees stated that this knowledge is the foundation for the quick decisions which have to be made in crisis situations. Informed decisions are easier made if the organisation, its strengths and weaknesses, the market it operates in, its crisis preparedness and the main players are already known. Two of the interviewees stated that PR practitioners should have the required degree of expertise to handle the situation appropriately even without the knowledge. It shows the real expertise of PR practitioners if they are able to acquire the necessary information in a short time in order to deal with the crisis properly.

Culture (national, regional, and organisational culture)

One of the most difficult challenges for public relations is the area of crisis communication in the international marketplace, as cultural und societal variations affect the communication between international organisations and publics in their host nations (Taylor, 2000).

Effects of national and regional culture on crisis communication

A number of interesting findings emerged from the question if national or regional culture effects crisis communication. Two interviewees, taking the macro perspective, stated that it does not affect the fundamental principles of crisis management. The core principles (evaluating the crisis and defining the key stakeholders) are not affected by national environments and remain the same in every country. Apparently the interviewees related their answers to the management of crisis and not specifically to the communication aspect of it. It seems to be perspicuous that the process of defining the crisis and key stakeholders is not changed or affected by the environment. Grunig et al.

(1995) and Falkenheimer and Heide (2006), in contrast, challenged the assumption that public relations can be practiced in similar ways in different countries.

Other interviewees related their statements to the crisis communication itself and saw culturally influenced differences, especially in Asian countries. Asian cultures were especially highlighted as they have cultivated the unwillingness to discuss and admit problems openly, caused by fear of face loss. This lack of transparency contradicts Western approaches to crisis communication which suggest transparency, truthfulness, consistency, and empathy in crisis communication (Coombs, 1999; Falkenheimer & Heide, 2010; Gregory, 2008). Kent (2010) adds that also crisis communication strategies itself are subjected to changes, as strategies such as apology are not used in the same way in China, Japan, Germany, Israel, Russia, or the USA. A study by Lee (2004) shows that although the strategies used most often in China are similar to those used in Western cultures, the public acceptance of them differs significantly. As a conclusion, the more important question is not how culture influences crisis communication, but rather how culture influences audiences' perception and acceptance of crisis communication. Lee's (2004) results reflect crisis communication in China, however, a generalisation for Asian countries is not more probable as it is for Western countries, as one of the following paragraphs shows.

Western countries (liberal democracies) show no differences in terms of crisis. This statement made by one of the interviewees conflicts with the results of a case study mentioned in the literature review about Coca Cola's soft drink contamination in Europe in 1999. Six European countries were assessed in terms of reactions, using Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions. The study reported that the two cultural variables of uncertainty avoidance and power distance played an important role in how publics tolerate crisis and in that course organisation's behaviour and communication strategies. Three countries, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark did not react very strongly, whereas Belgium, France, and Spain reacted quite strongly to the crisis. This demonstrates that although all of these European countries have Western democratic systems, the individual reaction can be quite different. Taylor (2000) concluded that people in countries with high uncertainty avoidance and power distance tend to react more strongly and quickly to perceived threats.

Interestingly interviewee (A3), who made this comment, had worked all over Europe (from London), so probably this study just did not reflect his personal experience.

Apparently culture also defines how organisations behave in host countries (Taylor, 2000). Cultural differences in business attitudes were evident in the example of the Korean company in Australia which tried to threaten the Australian media into silence. Probably the company would have had more influence on the media in Korea. Academic research supports the notion that if an organisation lacks the understanding of the cultural norms in the host nations, unfortunate incidents can become huge a crisis and damage the relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders (Taylor, 2000). Communication, especially for transnational corporations, is more and more subjected to international influences as they have to communicate with and in multiple countries and cultures (Coombs & Holladay, 2010).

Interviewee NZ1 emphasised the point that culture influences how publics react to crisis and crisis communication. Using Pacific Islanders or people living in rural areas of New Zealand as an example, he stated that they react to natural disasters such as floods with a much more accepting attitude. This raises the question how much the common or frequent exposure to possible or actual crisis influences the reaction and perception of the de facto crisis. If a higher exposure to a possible or actual crisis lowers anxiety, this would also in sequence influence and affect crisis communication. As Lee's (2004) study and Taylor's (2000) Coca Cola example demonstrate, culture plays a very important role in the public's reaction to a crisis, crisis communication strategies, and crisis communication messages.

Another point raised was that not only culture in a country has to be taken into consideration, but also the cultural segmentations in countries, as for example Fiji with its cultural and religious variety. Sison (2009) supported this notion by stating that research should not only analyse national culture, but also the segmentations in multicultural countries such as Australia (and New Zealand). She stresses that "aside from ethnicity and religious differences, there are also regional differences that impact on how people respond to messages" (p. 2).

Effects of organisational culture and structure on crisis communication

A key finding on the question if organisational culture or structure affects crisis communication is that it was clearly perceived as having an even greater effect than national culture. One of the interviewees saw organisational culture as “the most critical thing that can work for or against a company in a crisis” (A1). Research recognises that most organisational crises are mainly due to the complexities of modern companies. Organisational culture can be a predictor of crisis, as it reflects the organisations’ perspective on issues such as safety and the handling of problems. It also provides information about the organisation’s ability to identify possible threats and communicate with its stakeholders and the media (Hutchins & Wang, 2008). Pearson and Mitroff (1993) proposed that among other, organisational culture and structure are the factors which influence crisis events in organisations. Taylor (2010) added that these factors influence the public relations messages more than the individual skills of communication experts. She stated that one of the reasons for organisational crisis is often a lack of communication and connection between organisational units, which can lead to the inability to recognise threats and interpret crucial information. A good example for the lack of communication as a crisis cause was the in the interview that mentioned the Ribena case. Sapriel (2003) explained that most business crises are non-event related and mostly originated in management inaction or neglect.

The interviewees perceived organisational culture and structure as one of the factors that significantly affect crisis management and communication. How well an organisation is managed and how well communication flows is significant to communication in a crisis. Bechler (1995) backed this observation up by pointing out that the role of leadership is most important for organisational crisis handling as well as communication networks, especially those responsible for communication between internal and external audiences. Gregory (2008) emphasised that the organisational communication in a crisis often reflects the overall organisational culture and its communication ability, which does not improve during a crisis.

Management and leadership were seen as vital by the interviewees. Interviewee A3 pointed out that organisational culture and structure, as well as the management, play

an important role and have to be taken into consideration. Academic research agrees with the practitioners' standpoints as crisis cannot be managed by consensus, but needs leadership to make the decisions and lead the organisation through the crisis (Sapriel, 2003). Jaques (2010) observed that although a crisis can damage organisational reputations and financial performance massively, organisations often delegate responsibilities for crisis management to the middle management whereas reputational management sits at the executive table. One interviewee (NZ2), in line with Jaques' observation, stated that in a crisis the person who "owns the crisis" has to be indentified to make the crucial and necessary decisions, which cannot be just delegated to, for instance, the marketing manager. An additional point was made by another interviewee, stating that also the legal form of a company plays a role. Publicly listed organisations have responsibility for their shareholders and therefore the obligation to communicate quickly.

Crisis communication in government, corporate, small, and medium-sized organisations

The interviewees held different standpoints with regard to the different organisational structures and, as literature states, the unique cultures of government organisations. They stated that government organisations have other priorities than private organisations. Working with public organisations or governments can be more difficult as there are many officials and leaders to be considered in decision making in addition to bureaucracy. The decision making process often involves numerous meetings, whereas in corporate organisations the CEO can be asked to make an immediate decision to save the company's reputation.

Scholars note that most research does not make a distinction between business organisation and public organisations, as most of the crisis definitions show; only a few studies have examined crises within government agencies (Avery & Lariscy, 2010; Liu & Horsley, 2007; Tracy, 2007). Government agencies have unique characteristics, complex structures, and are distinctly more prone to lingering crisis (Avery & Lariscy, 2010; Tracy, 2007). Liu and Horsley (2007) pointed out that public organisations are subjected to constraints and are often limited by legal confinements in their "open and transparent"

communication. The whole situation is aggravated by intensive media interest and scrutiny.

The interviewees remarked that government institutions are usually more worried about media and political impact, whereas corporate organisations are more worried about reputation, shareholders, and customer relationships. Seeger (2006) stated that in crisis communication the priorities of public and private organisations may differ, as government agencies may place their priorities on re-establishing public order, whereas private organisations may seek to limit the reputational damage.

Corporate organisations were also seen as quite demanding in terms of crisis management and crisis communication. They have complicated structures and there are many people in the chain of command which have to be asked for consensus. The CEO might be in a different country, culture, speaking a different language, and living in another time zone. Quick response and reaction to crisis is difficult in these circumstances as crisis communication has to happen across different nations, cultures, and geographical borders. The example mentioned by one Australian interviewee about an international gas company in Australia illustrates quite well how the lack of cultural understanding in an organisation's headquarter can sabotage the crisis efforts of local teams, which relates to Taylor's (2000) research on multinational corporate organisations in host countries. The question about corporate organisations is also clearly linked to culture and applicability of headquarter strategies in other countries.

With regard to the structural influences of smaller companies the interviewees stated that decision making processes in smaller companies can be quicker, as less people have to give their consent. The single greatest limitation for small companies in crisis is the financial issue. The budget often does not allow money to hire additional staff such as experts who know how to deal with a crisis. Staff members in small organisations often do not know how to manage a crisis and have no capacity for full time crisis management. Kent (2010) pointed out that most crisis strategies have been studied on large, corporate-style organisations, and not on small or medium sized organisations which do not have the same media access or resources. The interviewees' comments showed agreement in terms of the resource issue, but they did not see any limitations in terms of media access. In fact,

they pointed out that the media probably would not be terribly interested in small companies in crisis. Working “under the media radar” could be perceived as something positive, as Heath states that “crisis prevention can be seen as working to avoid negative media attention” (p. 1). If media are not interested, they will not draw attention to the organisation and distribute a negative picture.

Crisis communication in different circumstances

The evaluation of the influence of circumstances on crisis communication produced various, unexpected results. As the cultural aspects (national, regional, structural) had been discussed in the previous section, the interviewees were asked to assess other circumstances such as crisis type and affected industry. Kent (2010) points out that there is not enough research providing advice to practitioners as to which crisis strategies work best in different industries or under different circumstances.

Although the possible meaning of “circumstances” was explained briefly to the interviewees, they chose to understand the question in different ways and were not corrected, as this suits the nature of qualitative interviews. One key point stressed was that crisis communication can change quite significantly in terms of scale. If a lot of people are involved, for instance in a natural disaster, the communication needs to be more widespread. Another key point was that if international companies and global stakeholders are affected, as in the current BP case, the interest will be greater and more global media will follow the event. If it’s a purely reputational crisis on a smaller scale only parts of an organisation might be affected.

Another interviewee examined circumstances from a financial and managerial point of view. Budget can be an important circumstance, because if a lot of money is available, more communication channels can be used and the message spread wider. The managerial aspect highlights the CEO’s behaviour. If the CEO is willing to engage and be the face of the company, it is more beneficial than if the CEO wants to stay out of view.

Although all these factors can play a role, half of the interviewees were in agreement that crisis usually follows the same patterns and the “principles of managing crisis do not change, no matter what the circumstances” (A1). With regard to

communication, however, circumstances play an important role, as Benoit (1997a) pointed out. It is most important for the organisation to analyse the nature of the crisis, to know the key audiences, so that they can customise their messages in regard to the different stakeholder groups. Seeger (2006) and Kent (2010) added that professional and organisational contexts are very important and what works in one industry may have limited applicability to another, as contextual factors and situational variables have an influence on crisis communication.

The role of industry also plays a role in terms of susceptibility to frequency of occurrence and type of crisis. Some industries are more prone to certain types of crisis and crisis itself, as for example airlines or oil and gas companies. Benoit (1997a) stated that although crises are usually seen as unpredictable, in some industries they can be anticipated due to the nature of the business.

According to scholars the type of crisis with regard to responsibility plays a great role in crisis communication and strategy choice. If a crisis is caused by a human error, people tend to attribute more responsibility to the organisation as when it is caused by a technical error (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Coombs, 2007a). Moreover, when the crisis is perceived as having been preventable more blame is assigned to the organisation, which should have been able and taken steps to prevent it. People attribute responsibility for a crisis based on their assessment to which extent organisation or circumstances are responsible (Coombs, 2007a; Holladay, 2010).

The analysis of possible influences of circumstances on crisis communication showed that the type of crisis or the industry in which the crisis happens play an important role in crisis communication. For instance, if an accident happens in an industry prone to crisis such as a gas and oil company, the attributed responsibility to the organisation can be higher, as organisations in “risk” industries are expected to be better prepared for crisis and take preventive steps to avoid crisis. If the accident is caused through employees not properly fulfilling their task, the assigned responsibility will be even higher, as the current BP crisis illustrates. Another important factor is crisis history; organisations frequently affected by crisis are perceived as more responsible, as they should have learned from the past crisis and should have been able to prevent further crisis.

Worst type crisis scenarios

As every crisis is seen as a negative, harmful event, the interviewees were asked if there are some scenarios which may have more negative impact than others. Remarkably all the interviewees agreed that death is the worst scenario. They stated that death of anybody involved in an organisation's business, caused by negligence or as a result of a company's actions, is most difficult to manage from a communications perspective. Again the type of crisis (seen from the responsibility view) plays a significant role in the crisis work. As Coombs and Holladay (2010) explain, stakeholders will assign different degrees of responsibility to the organisation depending on the causes for the crisis. If the organisation is seen as the victim of the crisis (natural disaster, product tampering, or workplace violence) the responsibility attribution will be low. If the crisis falls into the accident category (technical error accidents or technical error harm) the responsibility attribution will be moderate. If the crisis is seen as a preventable crisis (human-error accidents, human-error product harm, or organisational misdeed) the attribution of responsibility will be strong.

It can be concluded (including the interviewees' insights) that death caused through preventable actions or incidents would have to count as the worst type of scenario. A second scenario proposed by interviewee A2 was serious environmental damage, as large-scale disasters such as the Exxon Valdez incident are never going to be forgotten.

Strategy applicability

The questions about differences in strategy usability between Australia and New Zealand revealed that there are generally no differences between the two countries, except for a few cultural nuances in NZ. The results in terms of differences in crisis communication show significant distinctions. Where the Australians did not see many differences in comparison to other countries, the New Zealanders pointed out that the country size, the smaller scale of crisis, and the closer relationships to the media play an important role in crisis communication.

International and headquarter strategies

On the subject of applicability of international strategies in their home country the interviewees did not agree with each other in their replies. The answers comprised of statements that ranged from “could be applied” to “could not be applied”. Two of the interviewees stated that international strategies could be applied in other countries, one of them explaining that a strategy which had worked in the US would work in Australia as well as in New Zealand. Both answers were rather related to crisis management than to crisis communication. Half of the interviewees stated that the strategies could be applied, but they would have to be adjusted to the national framework. One of the interviewees replied that a distinctly Australian approach would not work in New Zealand.

Where the statements were quite straightforward in terms of applicability of international strategies to other countries, the interviewees showed more cautiousness regarding headquarter crisis strategies. Headquarter strategies were perceived as being useful as a guide, but not as the ultimate bible on how to manage a crisis. Global planning but local tailoring emerged as a way how to solve this problem. Global planning would include a scheme or structure, but with enough flexibility to adjust to national and cultural frameworks. Another solution proposed was some kind of “idea box”, where practitioners could pick out what could and would work in their own country.

In conjunction with the international strategies section above the analysis has to be done with the awareness that many of the big corporate organisations originated in the United States, and that the Australian and New Zealand interviewees live and operate in Western societies. Although global planning might work on a crisis management level, the local tailoring for countries with very different national and cultural frameworks such as Asian, Arabian, or African countries might be more difficult and take more effort.

Best practice approaches

Kent (2010) stated that research lists dozens of possible crisis response strategies, but it would be significantly more helpful to know which strategies work best in specific situations. To evaluate this issue the interviewees were asked for their “best practice” approaches. The contributions presented different ideas and variable approaches. Two of

the interviewees stated that there is no best practice approach, as every crisis is unique and has to be managed and assessed individually. Scholars are in line with that statement and point out that the unique attributes of every crisis make it difficult to anticipate all the necessary message strategies in advance. The strategies and components must be carefully adjusted to every crisis situation (Avery & Lariscy, 2010). One of the interviewees stated, using the macro view on the issue that the core principles of crisis handling apply in every situation. Another contribution differed slightly by stating there are overall approaches or principles which work, but every situation has to be assessed individually. One of the interviewees commented that his best practice approach is usually a combination of strategies, depending on the type of crisis, as product failure would be treated differently as the loss of life savings due to the financial crisis.

Kent (2010) critiqued that although research in crisis communication is increasing, there is no tangible advice for practitioners which crisis strategies are more valuable than others, which strategies work best in different circumstances. This observation is only partly true as a study by Kim et al. (2009) evaluated crisis response strategies in terms of crisis type and strategy success from 1991 to 2009. The research gives useful insights into which strategy did work or did not work under certain crisis conditions.

Worst strategy approaches

One of the worst strategies, on which all interviewees agreed, was if organisations decide not to communicate. To deny that there is a problem and not to be honest was named as the second worst strategy. This finding is similar to results of academic studies such as Kim's et al. (2009) evaluation of crisis response strategies. It reported that although denial was the least effective strategy in regard to outcome, it was used the most often. Denial is only useful if the organisation is really not responsible for the crisis. Research shows that organisations regularly make obvious mistakes such as denying and evading responsibility, shifting the blame to someone else without due cause, or lying about evidence (Ulmer et al., 2010). With regard to the "shifting the blame" strategy one of the interviewees stated "You cannot blame someone else, for instance a supplier. The ultimate seller has the responsibility, even if a part was faulty" (A1). Holladay (2010)

contradicts this statement in her study on crisis communication strategies and argues the opposite. She discovered that people will assign little responsibility if the organisation is perceived as the victim of the crisis or the victim of other's actions (crisis as accident, result of technical problems) and when, for instance, the crisis stems from a supplier's failure to act responsibly or from a technical accident such as faulty or malfunctioning equipment (pipes, hoses).

According to Nathan (2000) organisations often deny and shut-off communication, which are strategies preventing the organisation from rising above the threat. "Not sharing of information and not being transparent is the worst thing to do in crises" (A3). In general, as the interviewees stated, if organisations are slow to respond or acknowledge the crisis, close down the lines of communication, hope the crisis will disappear, the media will reveal it eventually. How the organisation's crisis appears on the media is very, very important. There is no substitute for truth and honesty in crisis communication, as Sellnow and Vidoloff (2009) inferred. Dishonesty by the organisation will eventually be revealed and organisations caught in it will be seen as guilty and trying to camouflage their guilt. Again, this statement might be true for Western countries and cultures. However, Lee's (2004) study showed that some communication strategies are more accepted in Asian countries than in Western countries. An example is the "no comment" strategy, which was seen as one of the worst by the interviewees, but is perceived differently in China, where silence is seen as wise behaviour. Apology strategy, on the other hand, is less valued in China where apologies are used frequently in a ritualistic sense and therefore are not taken as seriously as the acceptance of responsibility or the offer of compensation.

Another example of wrong strategies was the minimalist approach. If organisations do not want to invest money into crisis management and communication and delegate decisions to lower levels where they cannot be made.

Stakeholder consideration

Stakeholder's perception of an event is what decides if it is a crisis or not. The safety of its stakeholders should be first priority for organisations and come before

concerns for reputation and finances (Coombs, 2007b; 2009; Falkenheimer & Heide, 2010).

Research from the stakeholder perspective

The analysis of the research question on relevance of stakeholder perspective in crisis showed that stakeholders are perceived as absolutely important, as confirmed by all interviewees. Stakeholders were seen as the main focus of the interviewees work. Research from the stakeholder perspective would have great relevance in practice and would be used to measure the practical efforts of the practitioners, to improve management and communication processes, to evaluate which messages were most credible, and to get a reflection of stakeholder opinion on whether they think the organisation in crisis has done enough.

Scholars argue that most of the research focuses primarily on understanding crisis events from an organisation's perspective and that research should also focus on the impacts of crisis on stakeholder groups. The one-sided analysis neglects the stakeholder perspective and how stakeholders see and process information in a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Fediuk et al., 2010; Kent, 2010). Much research on crisis managements shows that organisations tend to emphasis their own concerns and shareholder interest over those of their stakeholders (Ulmer, 2001). Kent (2010) observes that, from a practitioner's standpoint, the organisation is their main employer and therefore practitioners focus on meeting the organisation's needs.

This observation was clearly contradicted by the interviewees' statements which gave stakeholders high priority and by the following rating results, which placed organisation and internal stakeholders on equal rank. However, the interviewees all chose to understand the question from an organisations' point of view. Comments made regarding the question of relevance of stakeholder perspectives reflect this standpoint rather well. The practitioners are mostly interested in how stakeholders receive their or the organisation's messages, which they experience as most trustworthy, and how they gauge the practical efforts of the practitioners. Statements such as the research on stakeholder perspective would be "...very interesting, but often research in that area is not done as

organisations are too busy fighting the issue” (A3) show that the practitioners do not take into consideration that the issue for the organisation could be a crisis for the stakeholders as well. As Heath (2010) points out, by concentrating on the organisation as the sole victim of a crisis, researchers neglect other victims for which the crisis might be as serious as for the organisation itself.

Clear exceptions are natural disasters, where usually the victims are the centre of attention. Nevertheless, research on these kind of crisis incidents, for instance on the hurricane Katrina (Avery & Lariscy, 2010), is again conducted from the organisational perspective, in this case the evaluation the effectiveness of the responsible government institutions.

In consideration of how stakeholders experience and process messages during a crisis, Fediuk et al. (2010) argue that research should try to examine crisis from the receiver perspective instead of only from the sender perspective. As they point out, different stakeholder groups have different values and understanding what drives them will help to create better messages to target the audiences. The interviewees’ curiosity and estimation in the stakeholder perspective shows evidently interest in the receiver perspective.

The research results established stakeholders as highly important for practitioners work. To explore differences between the different stakeholder groups, the practitioners were asked to explain the relevance of internal and external stakeholders and to rate them together with the organisation and other stakeholder groups.

Internal, external, and other stakeholder groups

Several interviewees identified internal and external stakeholders as equally important; one of the interviewees even saw them as the most important group. Messages for internal and external stakeholders are phrased differently and distributed through different channels. The information for internal stakeholders includes more details which are relevant for employees, but would be less relevant for external stakeholders. Internal messages are forwarded through an organisation’s intranet, email, and so forth, whereas the Internet, traditional media, and so forth are used as channels for the external audiences.

Evans et al. (2001) pointed out that in order to maintain credibility with internal and external stakeholders, the organisation in crisis has to react and respond quickly.

However, organisational crisis response messages to internal and external stakeholder groups are a difficult balancing act (Gregory, 2008). A study by Coombs (1999) reported the curious result that if stakeholders were given too much detailed information in a human error incident, they got the impression the crisis would have been preventable, which attributed more responsibility to the organisation for the crisis (Coombs 2007a; 2007b; Holladay, 2010).

Fediuk et al. (2010) stated that not all stakeholders perceive crises events in the same way. Different stakeholder groups may have different expectations and priorities. As mentioned in the interviews, internal stakeholders hold a special position, as firstly, the crisis for them often lasts the longest and second, internal stakeholders can be mobilised as support groups for the organisation (Ulmer, 2001) and be “the best people out in the marketplace” (NZ1). Evans et al. (2001) observed that crisis strategies often fail, because organisations are reluctant to discuss major problems with their employees. Not all stakeholders are impacted to the same degree by a crisis, as it depends on how much the incident impacts on stakeholders’ personal goals. The greater the impact, the more serious is incident for this specific group (Fediuk et al., 2010).

The rating of organisation and stakeholder groups was meant to provide information about the relevance of key groups and their supposed importance for the interviewees. The rating showed that half of the practitioners thought organisation, internal stakeholders, external stakeholders, and others (media, government, community and so forth) as equally critically important. One interviewee saw internal stakeholders as most important, another the organisation, and one stated that the rating could not be generalised as every crisis is different and also the priorities of the different groups. The organisation and internal stakeholders ranked on 4.8 (scale 1 to 5), external stakeholders on 4.6, and others on 4.3. Nikolaev (2010) asserted that first, employees, second, mass media and third, others such as customers, consumers, community, and general public are the most important publics for organisations in crisis. The different stages of a crisis also require different types of information to be communicated. The objectives may change however in

the different stages of the crisis (Sturges, 1994). This leads to the assumption that maybe not only the types of information communicated changes at certain stages of the crisis, but also the importance and priority of specific stakeholder groups. It would be plausible that if the needs of one group are satisfied, another group comes more into focus.

Stakeholder reaction check

To monitor stakeholder reactions to crisis response strategies, the interviewees used a variety of tools. The contributions are in line with the literature which suggests that telephone, email systems, internet and intranet should be used to communicate consistent messages and to observe stakeholder reactions (Nikolaev, 2010; Massey & Larsen, 2006; Stephens & Malone, 2010). Sapriel (2003) stressed that communicating with stakeholders is only half of the job; listening to them to ensure the internal view mirrors the external is as important. Another tool to scrutinise stakeholder reactions are social media which are increasingly important, as one of the interviewees indicated “these are real people talking about a company and its happening live minute by minute” (A2).

Stephens and Malone (2010) noted that the availability of new media has expanded the organisations options for communicating in crisis and social media are accepted tools for establishing dialogue with stakeholders. Coombs (2008), in addition, saw social media not only as a useful tool during a crisis, but also as a way to identify developing crises in the pre-crisis phase and to examine stakeholder perceptions of organisational responses in the post-crisis phase.

Most academic crisis research analysed crisis and crisis handling after the event (Kent, 2010). External practitioners, however, do post-crisis research conditionally if they are commissioned by the organisation. The research is conducted one to twelve months after the crisis to check if perceptions of stakeholders have returned to a pre-crisis standpoint. This “research gap” is often filled by academic research, most likely in high-profile cases which raised a lot of attention.

Usefulness of academic research

One interesting result obtained from the interviews was that academic research on crisis management and crisis communication does not have that much relevance for the interviewees in their every day work. The interviewees implied that it is a good foundation, terribly interesting, but by far not as important as actual experience in the work area. The shortcomings of academic research were seen in the lack of real world insights and the slow speed of development, which cannot keep up with the very quickly evolving discipline of public relations. As stated by several interviewees, academic research is not seen as up-to-date and textbook approaches are of limited usability in practice, whereas “own experience and the shared experiences of big profile crisis management case studies far outweigh academic research” (A2). This finding is in line with Galloway’s (2004) observation that practitioners often rely more on their own experience and insights gained through previous work than on the application of methodologies.

Additional evidence for this attitude is provided by Kim’s et al. (2009) study which reported that practitioners do not seem to abide to the best practice advice based on two decades of crisis research. They clearly observed a big gap between crisis communication practice and academia. Recommendations made by academics were clearly ignored in practice. For instance, one of the most used strategies in Kim’s et al. study was denial, which was also clearly the least successful one and is not recommended by crisis research. However, although Kim’s et al. findings speak for themselves, they do not provide detailed information whether or not the sampled organisations used external crisis management and communication experts. The interviewees in this research project evidently named denial as one of the worst possible strategies for organisations in crisis.

Coombs (2010a) observed that although crisis communication research began in practice and was then taken on by academics, practice research is now often ahead of theory. He emphasises that theory and practice must intersect, if research wants to produce useful and applicable research rather than being a purely academic exercise.

Although it was agreed on that academic research has restricted benefits, it was not seen as a positive development by the interviewees. One of the practitioners pointed out that only because some strategies have worked well before, one should not only rely on

them but make sure they are currently best practice. But if academic research is, as stated, developing slower by far, how could it inform about best practices nowadays?

With regard to the quickly developing discipline of public relations, one of the interviewees (NZ2) made an interesting comment. He stated that if he would go out of business for the next few years, his acquired knowledge in 32 years of work experience would still apply in a few years time. The only change might be the distribution channels for crisis communication. This stands in contrast with earlier statements that the public relations discipline is evolving too fast for academic research, but the evolution does not seem to affect already acquired knowledge. This leads to the assumption that the basics of the discipline remain the same. One of the interviewees, when asked about changes in this work area in the last few years, stated that “the fundamentals of crisis management and crisis communication have been there for a while and they are continually just getting redefined”. A combination of real world experience and academic research, done by academics with actual work experience in this area in the form of case studies, was seen as most useful by the interviewees.

In conjunction with the section above academics on the other hand only show “occasional” interest in practitioners’ views. Practitioners, on the other hand, rather use the information offers of their Public Relations Institutes in the form of newsletters and training courses, in-house research, conferences, and networking for their further training and professional development.

The demand for further research was clearly seen in the area of social media with regard to use and usefulness in crisis communication. Quoting of academic research in the literature review and analysis show that academia has already discovered social media as an area of research interest, although explicit studies to usefulness in crisis communication are yet to be explored. Individual comments point to research on reputational crisis in a non-physical way and society change and expectations with regard to crisis. With regard to non-physical crisis Heath (2010) pointed out that often non-dramatic crisis events such as wrong management behaviour are neglected, although they are even more likely to endanger an organisation’s existence than one-time events. Another interest was shown in research on the effectiveness of mass communication in crisis and crisis framing in the

media. Media are, as Heath (2010) and Ashcroft (1997) pointed out, very interested in the negative aspects which are involved with crisis, which also draw the attention of stakeholders and public. This proposed research also relates in some way to the findings about the overuse of the term crisis in the media, which is done to get more attention (Coombs, 2010a; Ulmer et al., 2005) and increase sales figures.

Case studies, although by academics seen as having limited generalisability (Coombs, 2007a; Cutler, 2004), were mentioned repeatedly as most useful for practitioners and one of the most powerful tools of academia. This kind of applied, descriptive research was perceived as a practical method to examine crisis incidents in depth and a good place for academia to fill the research gap.

One of the greatest changes in crisis management and communication was seen in the impact of technology and the use of social media. Social media were perceived as an accepted and useful tool in pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis communication. The speed of technology was remarked on as one of the factors which make it nowadays nearly impossible to contain or cover-up a crisis. Also noteworthy are the changed societal expectations in terms of crisis. According to the interviewees, nowadays heightened expectations of governments and publics are predominant that organisations will communicate in a crisis, will accept the blame, and spend money to compensate for the damage done.

Coombs and Holladay (2010) stated that “even though the body of crisis communication research is expanding rapidly, there is still ample room for growth” (p. 676). Interestingly the observed trends and changes also reflect the practitioners’ interests and demands for further research.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

The current research project aimed to evaluate crisis communication in theory and practice in an Australia and New Zealand context, but also with specific regard to influences of culture, strategy applicability, and stakeholder consideration. The three main research questions and five sub-questions have been evaluated, discussed, and answered in the previous two chapters, using content-analysis and in-depth-interviews as data collection methods for the exploration of theory and practice. In this chapter, the results for the individual questions are summarised and presented, followed by a conclusion of the results, a summary of the results, the limitations of the research project, and finally the reflections for future research.

How does culture influence crisis communication and its effectiveness?

The findings suggest that culture affects crisis communication on a strategy and response level. Crisis management is less affected, as the fundamentals, using Pearson and Mitroff's (1993) classification of crisis identification, preparation and prevention, containment and damage limitation, recovery, and learning remain the same in every country. However, there can be delays between the individual phases in some cultures. The core principles of crisis management, the establishment of what exactly the crisis is and the definition of the key stakeholders, are not influenced by national environments. At the crisis communication level, as the results propose, culture can have a significant influence. Particularly in Asian cultures, where the core principles of crisis communication (transparency, honesty, and consistency) are less valued than in Western societies. The communication strategies are, as reported in Lee's (2004) Chinese example, for the most part the same, but the crisis response messages are differently phrased and distributed. What is said and who says it can differ from country to country.

As established in the previous chapters, culture not only defines how organisations or individuals behave in a crisis, it also governs how stakeholders and the public react to a crisis and its communication. The most remarkable finding with regard to culture is that although studies show the use of more or less the same communication

strategies in Asian countries as in Western countries, the acceptance and reaction to them by the public proves to be different. What is seen as effective and appropriate crisis communication in one country can trigger opposite perceptions and reactions in other countries. Furthermore, cultural segmentation in countries with multinational populations should not be disregarded, as different cultural backgrounds also affect the perception of a crisis. The examples quoted in the preceding chapters illustrated that an organisation's lack of understanding of cultural and societal expectations, especially in host countries, can aggravate issues and create dramatic crises which can result in serious damage to the stakeholder relationships and the organisation's reputation. However, a generalisation of Western culture has been proven to be incongruous as examples highlighted and reactions to a crisis and its communication can considerably differ across Western cultures and countries. A similar incongruity can be assumed to be true for Asian cultures as well as for other cultures and countries.

How do different circumstances such as an organisation's size, corporate/non-corporate status, or industry influence crisis communication and the applicability of communication strategies?

The results suggest that organisational culture and structure are significant, if not the most significant factors in crisis management and communication. In support of this assertion the literature review outlined that organisational culture and structure can be the predictor as well as the cause for a crisis, as crises are often generated in the organisation itself. Reasons for this are often cited as dysfunctional communication patterns such as the lack of communication between different organisational units, top management's approach to issues and, as most organisational crises are not caused by on-time events, wrong business decisions. The overall evaluation showed that organisational culture and structure are factors which highly affect crisis management, crisis communication, and strategy applicability.

The assessment of different organisational types was particularly undertaken to reveal their implication for crisis management, crisis communication, and strategy use. Public organisations distinguish themselves particularly through other decision making

processes, different priorities and concerns in crisis. The chain of command differs from private organisations as frequently more people are involved and democratic decision making requires different processes which makes quick decision making in a crisis difficult. Public organisations are also often subjected to legal constraints which influence their communication with publics, so even if they want to, they may not be allowed to tell everything. The main concerns of public organisations in crisis are media, political impact, and publics, as one of the main tasks of public organisations is to serve the public. Research on public organisations was found to be clearly underrepresented.

Corporate organisations also possess complicated organisational structures with top management often situated in other time-zones, countries, and cultures. Quick decision making in crises is often hindered by these facts and sometimes aggravated by a lack of cultural understanding of publics and stakeholders in host countries. A crisis in one location (or subsidiary) can have the potential to spread and develop into a crisis worldwide. Crisis events in large scale corporations additionally generate great international media interest. In crisis situations corporate organisations are mostly concerned with reputation management, shareholders, and customer relationships.

Dealing with smaller companies in crisis was perceived as being less challenging, because normally fewer people have to give their consent to decisions, the crises have often a smaller scale, and small companies generally attract less media interest. Nevertheless, one of the main factors influencing crisis communication and strategies, the budget, is also a significant limitation for small companies. They often do not have the right staff to deal with the crisis and management often cannot afford to hire the communications experts or use all possible communication channels. Leadership was quoted frequently as another important factor for success or failure of crisis management and communication. A leader, who takes responsibility and shows willingness to “own” the problem and front the organisation, can make a huge difference.

Other circumstances found to influence crisis communication and strategies were the crisis type and industry. For instance, a large scale disaster, such as a natural disaster, affects crisis communication in the way that the messages need to be spread to a wider public. With regard to the type of industry, some industries are more susceptible to crisis

incidents than others. These “risk” industries are also expected to have better risk management plans in place in order to react quickly in an appropriate way. The crisis history of organisations also plays an important role in terms of responsibility attributed to the organisations for the crisis by its stakeholders. The type of crisis can also determine how much responsibility is assigned to the organisation. One of the most difficult crisis scenarios to manage and communicate was seen in the death of employees, customers, or other people connected to the organisation. This finding is supported by literature stating that, using the responsibility approach, human caused error resulting in death will assign the most responsibility and blame to the organisation.

The findings also showed that, with regard to culture, it is important to assess where a strategy originated. From an Australian point of view, there were no differences seen in strategy usability between Australia and New Zealand. From a New Zealand point of view, however, it was pointed out that strategies can be applied using much more personal approaches as the country is smaller, crises usually happen on a smaller scale and among other important factors, connections to media and government are much closer. The results regarding the use or applicability of international strategies are ambiguous, as there was no agreement between the interviewees and the literature. Some of the interviewees saw no limitations in the use of international strategies in their own country; others stated that an adjustment to the national frameworks would be necessary. The literature tends to acknowledge the need for national adjustment, but also generalises in terms of Western frameworks. With regard to the applicability of strategies created in the headquarters of a corporate organisation’s home country, the findings revealed that they were usable if they included global planning, but with enough flexibility for local adjustment.

The results of the investigation as to best or worst practice approaches indicated that although some scholars ask for best practice approaches or guidance as to whether or not strategy X works best in case Y, every crisis has unique attributes and needs to be assessed individually. The often stated academic claim for generalisability of research has to be assessed carefully in this context, as the results highlight that general principles or approaches may be useful, but do not override the need for individual assessment of the situation and adjustment of the strategies. A lack of communication or denial of problems

were seen by practitioners and academics as the worst strategies. Yet, these findings have to be viewed with caution and awareness of the Western framework of reference. No communication, following Confucius' maxim of seeing silence as wise behaviour, is socially accepted in China. The same applies to an apology, which is often ritualistic and overused in China and receives less sympathy there as in the acceptance of responsibility or offer of compensation. In contrast, an apology, often used in combination with other strategies, is entirely accepted in Western cultures.

How are stakeholders considered in crisis communication in Australia and New Zealand?

The analysis of the consideration of stakeholders in crisis communication in Australia and New Zealand shows that stakeholders are seen as enormously vital and important in both countries. As literature suggests, stakeholder's evaluation and perception of an event can make it into a crisis or not. Research from the stakeholder perspective is greatly underrepresented, but would have great relevance in practice as it would give practitioners the possibility to assess public relations practitioners and organisations efforts from the receiver perspective. The rating of relevance and importance of the organisation and different stakeholder groups put internal stakeholder and organisation on the same rank, closely followed by external stakeholders. Although the public relations practitioners stated that internal and external stakeholders are equally important, the rating showed a slightly higher rank for internal stakeholders, which is in line with research perceiving internal stakeholders as the most important group in a crisis. The communication in crisis situations for both groups is being carried out in different ways, using different communication channels. While internal stakeholders receive more detailed information, relevant for people inside the organisation through internal communication channels such as an organisation's intranet, meetings, or emails, external stakeholders usually get less detailed information through external communication channels such as traditional media and the Internet.

To ensure that the outside view of the crisis reflects the inside view, practitioners use a variety of tools such as telephone, email, and since recently also social media to monitor stakeholder reactions. The availability of new technology has enhanced the

communication options for both, organisations and stakeholders. Research on stakeholder perceptions after the crisis from external communication practitioners is generally carried out if they get commissioned by the organisations; nevertheless, this does not give any indications about possible internal research in the organisation after the crisis.

Notably, although stakeholders were seen as critically important, their standing by the public relations practitioners was mostly considered from the sender perspective. Public relations practitioners were mostly interested in stakeholders as feedback givers for their own and the organisation's efforts. The perspective of stakeholders as potential victims of the crisis was not considered by the public relations practitioners or in most of the literature. As literature suggests, crisis is often only understood and evaluated from the organisations perspective, victims outside of the organisation are often overlooked, and stakeholders are mostly only considered as the receiver of messages. Quite a few scholars argue for more research from the receiver instead of the sender perspective. However, no one demanded research that considers stakeholders as the senders of messages. If stakeholders are victims of the crisis as much as the organisation, it would be a logical development to evaluate how stakeholders perceive and experience the event, not only how they process messages given by the organisation. Overall, the results suggest that although stakeholders are seen as most important, stakeholder consideration is clearly one-sided.

In summary, the main research questions are closely related to each other, as culture includes national as well as organisational culture and structure, and culture influences strategy applicability, which as a result governs stakeholder reactions.

How many crisis communication research articles have been published in the last five years in Australia and New Zealand?

As the results gained from the analysis of the last five years were not sufficient to allow for a useful analysis, particularly in New Zealand, the intended time frame had to be extended from five to ten years. The analysis of eight chosen mediums included the Australian Journal of Communication, the Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal, PRism journal, the PRIA website, the Communication Journal of New Zealand, the PRINZ website, ANZCA conference papers, and the communication databases via Ebsco. The

extended analysis produced altogether 33 articles in Australia and New Zealand published in the last ten years. Altogether 27 articles were published in Australia within 11 different sources such as journals and websites; 6 articles were published in New Zealand within 3 different sources such as 2 journals and 1 website. The findings from this research uncovered a lack of public relations journals and academic publications in New Zealand as well as a decreasing number of publications, as the majority of articles were published before 2004. As a result, the small number of publications in New Zealand makes it difficult to draw consolidated conclusions. This situation is assumedly accounted for in the small country size and small number of tertiary institutions. In Australia, on the other hand, the number of publications increased after 2004. Nevertheless, the scattering of articles across a variety of different mediums makes it difficult to gain an overview over the whole research area, although the dispersion might provide just the right information for crisis managers in specific work areas. The database search additionally revealed quite a few publications of Australian and New Zealand authors in international academic journals.

How have theories been applied in crisis communication studies (i.e., theoretical application, use of research questions/hypothesis and names of theories)?

The findings report a slight predominance of non theoretical studies, which is probably grounded in the inclusion of public relations practitioners' work. An increase of theoretical work from 2006 on is visible in Australia, although not in New Zealand, as all of the published articles there were non-theoretical. These results contrast with the international developments until 2006 where theoretical studies were rather increasing and non-theoretical studies decreasing. In conjunction with the findings, the majority of studies in this research project did not use research questions or hypotheses. Furthermore, there were no studies found using hypotheses or a combination of research questions and hypotheses; only one third of all studies used research questions. Out of the 33 articles, 23 references to theories were found including, among others, the Issue and Crisis Management Theory, Organisational Theory, Situational Crisis Communication Theory, Apology Theory, and Attribution Theory. The results reveal that except for a few theories,

academics worldwide use more or less the same theories to evaluate the phenomenon of crisis. The proportion of articles and theories named is similar to international evaluations.

What are the methodological trends in crisis communication (i.e., quantitative/ qualitative methods, data gathering procedures and sources and sampling methods)?

The findings demonstrate a noticeable dominance of qualitative research which is partly due to the regard of public relations practitioners' studies. More than 80 percent of the studies used qualitative methods, in New Zealand all of the studies. These results show significant differences to international developments where qualitative research was only slightly dominant. As a data gathering procedure, qualitative context analysis was predominant in Australian, New Zealand, and international research. One of the main differences found between Australia, New Zealand, and internationally was the use, or rather lack of use, of experiment and survey for data collection in Australia and New Zealand. Reasons for frequent use of these methods internationally are possibly due to different regulations regarding student participation in research projects. Other methods frequently used in Australia and New Zealand were content analysis, literature review, and in-depth interviews. Related to experiment and survey is the finding that people are the main data source in Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) international study, whereas the main sources in Australia and New Zealand were mixed sources such as literature and media. The ranking of other data collection sources was quite similar in both assessed countries as well as internationally. The evaluation of the sampling methods showed a dominant use of systematic sampling, followed by purposive sampling, and mixed sampling in Australia and New Zealand, while only 50 percent of the studies provided this information at all.

What types of crisis communication research have been studied (i.e. research focus, crisis types, and crisis issues)

The analysis of the publications in terms of research focus indicates a concentration on the evaluation of crisis incidents, followed by the examination of effects of strategies in both countries and internationally. An examination of crisis types indicated

a high proportion of studies focusing on general crises, followed by the evaluation of mixed crises. Other crisis types such as tampering or terror, natural disasters, human error accidents, and technical error accidents were less often investigated. Indeed, the publications in New Zealand addressed only the first two crisis types. In contrast, the results from the international study indicate a completely different situation as they report technical error accidents, human error accidents, transgression and illegal behaviour inside organisations, and technical failures as the most frequently studied crisis types. Although the crisis types examined in Australia and New Zealand provide such an opposing result to the international study, one should still be careful in drawing conclusions in this specific area, as the incidents could just be a reflection of issues and events which happened at that specific moment in time and thus do not allow a generalisation of typical Australian or New Zealand issues.

In terms of crisis issues the results present a majority of studies investigating multiple crisis situations, followed closely by other crises such as political issues, health risks, and business issues; further behind are general crisis situations and environmental issues. The international study, on the other hand, reported a majority of general issues evaluated, followed by business related issues, environmental issues, health risks, and other issues. Some of the issues discussed can be assigned as specific for the country in question. For instance, Australia is often affected by bushfires which are less likely to occur in New Zealand, but then they could happen in every other country with similar temperature and environment. The same applies to the studies on NASA issues mentioned in the international study, which are certainly US issues, but then again, similar institutions in other countries could be affected by similar issues.

What are the theoretical frameworks and methodological trends in crisis communication case studies?

The results present a clear domination of case studies with more than 60 percent, both in Australia and New Zealand. These findings are evidently higher than in other international research on case studies such as Cutler's (2004), where only on third of all studies comprised case studies, or Seon-Kyoung and I-Huei's (2010) study which reported

a quota of 50 percent being case studies. The result in this research project is a consequence of the inclusion of public relations practitioners' work which comprised only case studies. The evaluation showed that only a small percentage of the studies included "case" in the title or abstract, but more than half of the case studies included a separate method and background section. The general tendency was clearly toward non-theoretical studies, as only on third of the case studies referred to theories and even less used research questions. Notably none of the New Zealand studies were coded as theoretical, whereas half of the Australian studies were. This finding opposes the previously mentioned international research studies which showed a clear majority of theoretical studies.

In terms of methodological approaches the focus was strongly on qualitative research, using qualitative context analysis as the preferred data collection method. These results indicate a dominance of qualitative research in Australia and New Zealand in comparison with the international studies which is, again, assumedly due to different student participation regulations. With regard to research orientations, the case studies showed a focus on the examination of crisis incidents, followed by an evaluation of effects of strategies.

Additional insights in crisis management and communication

To draw a bridge between theory and practice, between the different research methods of content-analysis and in-depth interviews and to gain a better understanding research area, the public relations practitioners consulted in this research project were asked additional, general questions.

The interviews revealed that crisis communication significantly differs from general PR. Organisations often approach external communication specialists only in times of crisis, as the low number of pre-existing business relationships between organisations and public relations practitioners suggests. Familiarity with the organisation is one factor which can influence the success and outcome of communication strategies. Nevertheless, as the public relations practitioners repeatedly pointed out, a public relations professional should be able to adapt to the situation in a short time and deal with the crisis appropriately, even without pre-existing knowledge of the organisation and its business

environment. Public relations practitioners rely heavily on their own experience in crisis situations and see academic research more as a foundation than useful for their every day work. Academics, on the other side, seldom approach practitioners for their research, as the limited sample of six public relations practitioners in two countries shows. The shortcomings of academic research from a public relations practitioner's point of view were seen in the lack of real world insights and the slow speed of development, which does not keep up with the rapid development in the public relations discipline. In practitioners' eyes their own experience outweighs academic studies by far and for them textbook approaches, theories, and models do not work in a real crisis.

Academic research, on the other hand, suggests that public relations practitioners do not use the insights gained through academic research. Kim et al.'s (2009) study on strategy use and success proves that organisations often make the wrong choice when it comes to crisis communication strategies. Nevertheless, in this research project, all the public relations practitioners were in accordance with the literature about what the inappropriate strategies would be. Furthermore, the study mentioned did not give any indication if the organisations employed communication experts to deal with the crises. According to Coombs (2010a), research must intersect with practice in order to produce applicable results. Obviously, this does not happen, as the literature and the interviews suggest. This fact could be one explanation for the public relations practitioners' lack of interest in academic research and the lack of specific public relations journals in New Zealand.

Case studies, often criticised by academics for their lack of theoretical application and generalisability, were seen as highly interesting by public relations practitioners and as a powerful way for academia to produce practice relevant research. The public relations practitioners considered new developments such as changes in technology and social media as the areas with the most demand for further research in crisis communication. While academia demands more theory and model building, public relations practitioners show more interest in non-theoretical research. In order to connect theory and practice, academia will have to find a way to make academic research more attractive to

practitioners, especially if the results of this kind of research are meant to be applied in real world situations.

A very interesting finding from this research project showed that the most experienced practitioners (experienced in terms of years of work experience, crisis cases, and international experience), repeatedly claimed that the core principles of crisis management and crisis communication remain the same, crises usually follow the same patterns, uninfluenced by culture or circumstances. This certainly shows that although crises only take up a small percentage of the practitioners every day work, experienced practitioners develop a crisis work routine. This crisis 101 allows them to handle every crisis appropriately through assessment of the situation and application of reliable procedures. When seen from an organisational standpoint, the handling of the crisis remains the same as management and communication (except for phrasing of messages and distribution) is uninfluenced by external factors – the way the audience reacts however will differ depending on the individual cases and/or the culture.

Summary

In conclusion, this project has discovered a number of key issues which are relevant in the assessment of crisis management and communication practices in Australia and New Zealand.

This research project finds that national culture has an influence on crisis management and communication. Although the core principles for crisis management remain mostly the same in every culture, crisis communication responses have to be phrased differently depending on the environment. Communication strategies used across cultures are mainly the same, which is supported by studies showing the use of similar strategies in Western as well as in Asian cultures and countries. The findings also propose that a generalisation of Western culture and Asian culture is not possible. Surprisingly, as the same communication strategies are used worldwide, the real focus need not be on how culture influences crisis communication, but rather on how publics and stakeholders in different cultures react to these strategies. Organisational culture was suggested to be one

of the main factors which influence crisis handling on a management and communication level. Organisational culture and structure can also be the reason for the development of a crisis and the biggest stumbling block in the attempt to solve the situation. Different organisational structures, public, corporate, small, or medium- sized present challenges for crisis communication as they offer differences in decision making processes, priorities, and media interest. Leadership was repeatedly pointed out as one of the core roles in a crisis.

The role of stakeholders, although acknowledged as vital for the organisation, was mostly considered from an organisation's perspective. Stakeholders were seen purely as receivers of organisational messages and often overlooked as potential victims of a crisis. The consideration of stakeholders from the organisations point of view was illustrated rather well by literature and public relations practitioners. Stakeholders were never considered as the senders of messages, but rather as a mirror to reflect organisations and practitioners efforts in communicating and solving the crisis.

The research study also showed a vast tendency to non-theoretical research in publications in Australia and New Zealand, favouring case studies as a research method. The small number of publications, especially in New Zealand, could suggest a low interest in academic research. This is possibly due to the lack of appropriate publication platforms, or the publication of Australian and New Zealand research in international journals. The high number of qualitative research studies is partly due to the inclusion of public relations practitioners work. Still, an overall tendency of non-theoretical, qualitative research is clearly recognisable. The low number of publications in New Zealand made it difficult to come to any conclusions, but together with the Australian results, the findings showed a few differences in comparison to international studies. Some of the differences are the possible consequence of different regulations regarding participants, or are rooted in diverse crisis events or issues arising at a specific time in a specific country. The most significant finding is that internationally the publications in the main public relations journals report an increase of theoretical studies, whereas this research project shows the opposite with an increase in non-theoretical studies. Any cultural influences in crisis communication in both analysed countries and internationally have not been recognised.

Limitations

This work was, as with all research, subject to several limitations. Caution is needed in the assessment of the interview results, as all the interviewees work and live in Western societies and probably assess the crisis communication issue through a Western framework. The statements may also reflect individual opinions and experiences which supposedly would have been different with the selection of other interviewees. The public relations practitioners' feedback is also frequently not in line with academic research findings.

Regarding the content analysis, the availability of articles for the whole time period of ten years was not given in all selected mediums. Some did only cover a few years or specific categories such as award winning research, which does not allow an overview about all possible relevant articles. The results of the content analysis have to be considered with care, as they only provide information about research publications in both countries, but not about the academic research activity itself. Articles have been found from Australian or New Zealand authors published singly or in cooperation with international authors in international journals. Additionally, some of the results show mathematical inaccuracies due to rounding inconsistencies.

Areas for Future Research

This study intended to explore crisis communication in theory and practice in an Australian and New Zealand context. The findings from this research project will hopefully add to a better understanding in the area of crisis communication and give incentives for further research. In context of the present research project a few major themes for future research emerge.

The evaluation of cultural influences showed that research in this area of crisis communication is still underrepresented. The results of this research project suggest that culture certainly influences crisis management and crisis communication and that further research in this area would aid in extending crisis communication knowledge. Even more

interesting are the findings on a strategy level, as the results propose that international strategies are applicable in other countries, if they are adjusted to the national framework. A comparison of different studies showed that similar strategies are used around the world, but, and this is most significant, the perception, reaction, and acceptance of the public and stakeholders differs from culture to culture. This fact demonstrates clearly that the influence of culture on crisis communication is important, but even more significant is audience reaction to this communication. This is a research area which is at this time still neglected and offers many research possibilities. In this context an evaluation of the influences of cultural segmentation in countries would be recommendable, as different cultural backgrounds also suggest different reactions to crisis communication. To provide a clearer picture of the cultural influences on audience and stakeholder perception of crisis communication strategies, a large scale study, such as Hofstede's (2001) study in 53 countries, would generate valuable knowledge. Hofstede's study evaluated cultural influences, but not specifically in terms of crisis and as concluded, in terms of how the public reacts to certain crisis communication strategies. Especially as generalisations, as established previously, of Western or Asian cultures do not reflect the cultural differences between cultures and countries under this umbrella term.

This research project also established that, although stakeholders are being perceived as very important, theory as well as practice mostly evaluates them from a sender perspective. Research from an audience or receiver perspective could contribute to the knowledge of how stakeholders process messages during a crisis. Additionally, with the main focus on the organisation, stakeholders are often being overlooked as the victims of a crisis. Research from the perspective of stakeholders as senders of messages could help to understand how stakeholders experience crisis when they are personally affected by it. The gained knowledge could be then transformed into appropriate organisational behaviour and communication during a crisis.

As every crisis is unique, it is not possible to find the exact management and communication strategy for every single possible event. Claims of academics on advice of which strategy is more useful than another have to be considered with care as generalisations for unique occurrences are rather difficult. Crisis research already provides

a great diversity of topics in a variety of different mediums. Instead of dissipating research into more and more diverse areas and topics, evaluating the crisis phenomenon from even more angles, using ever new theories for evaluation, maybe taking a step back and reassessing what has already been done would be a step in the right direction. Academics and practitioners face difficulties when trying to keep up-to-date with the newest developments, as often contradictory statements and claims prove. Many theories suggest similar strategies for crisis communication, using different categorisations and terms. Instead of adding to the complexity, a reanalysis and simplification of structures would provide a better overview and assumedly make it more practice suitable. In order to reconnect to practice, academic research would have to provide studies which are a balance between the mainstream “10 crisis solution steps” and the complex academic studies without practice relevance. The focus of academic research should be on new developments such as changes in technology or use of social media, which generate the demand for new knowledge and the creation of applicable, practice relevant research. Practitioners seem to operate in completely different spheres as academics, although as Coombs (2010a) pointed out, research in this area is not meant to be a purely academic exercise, but applicable research to solve real problems.

References

- Adkins, G. L. (2010). Organizational networks in disaster response: An examination of the US government network's efforts in hurricane Katrina. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 93-114). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Ashcroft, L. (1997). Crisis management – public relations. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 12(5), 325-332. Retrieved from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com>
- Avery, E. J., & Lariscy, R. W. (2010). FEMA and the rhetoric of redemption: New directions in crisis communication models for government agencies. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 320-334). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bechler, C. (1995). Looking beyond the immediate crisis response: Analyzing the organizational culture to understand the crisis. *Journal of the Association for Communication Administration*, 1, 1-17. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com>
- Benoit, W. (1997a). Image repair discourse and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 23(2), 177-186. doi:10.1016/S0363-8111(97)90023-0
- Benoit, W. (1997b). Hugh Grant's image restoration discourse: An actor apologizes. *Communication Quarterly*, 45(3), 251-267. Retrieved from <http://www.ecasite.org/>
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods* (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press
- Caldiero, C., Taylor, M., & Ungureanu, L. (2010). Organisational and media use of technology during fraud crisis. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 396-409). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Collis, J., & Hussey, R. (2003). *Business research – a practical guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students* (2nd ed.). Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Coombs, W. (1999). Information and compassion in crisis responses: A test of their effects. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 11(2), 125-142. Retrieved from <http://www.erlbaum.com/Journals/journals/JPRR/jpr.htm>

- Coombs, W. (2004). Impact of past crisis on current crisis communication: Insights from situational crisis. *Journal of Business Communication, 41*(3), 265-289.
doi:10.1177/0021943604265607
- Coombs, W. (2007a). *Ongoing crisis communication – planning, managing, and responding* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Coombs, W. (2007b). Crisis management and communications. Retrieved from http://www.instituteforpr.org/essential_knowledge/detail/crisis_management_and_communications/
- Coombs, W. (2007c). Protecting organizations' reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review, 10*(3), 163-176. doi:10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550049
- Coombs, W. (2007d). Attribution theory as a guide for post-crisis communication research. *Public Relations Review, 33*(2), 135-139. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.11.016
- Coombs, W. (2008). Crisis communication and social media. Retrieved from http://www.instituteforpr.org/essential_knowledge/detail/crisis_communication_and_social_media/
- Coombs, W. (2009). Conceptualizing crisis communication. In R. L. Heath, & H.D. O'Hair (Eds.). *Handbook of crisis and risk communication*. (pp. 100-119). New York: Routledge.
- Coombs, W. T. (2010a). Parameters for crisis communication. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 17-53). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Coombs, W. T. (2010b). Pursuing evidence-based crisis communication. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 719-725). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Coombs, W. T. (2010c). Crisis communication and its allied fields. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 54-64). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2010). Examining the effects of mutability and framing on perceptions of human error and technical error crisis: Implications for situational crisis communication theory. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 181-204). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2008). *Organization theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Cutler, A. (2004). Methodical failure: The use of case study method by public relations researchers. *Public Relations Review*, 30(3), 365-375.
[doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2004.05.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2004.05.008)
- Diaz, V., Abratt, R., Clarke, R., & Bendixen, M. (2008). PR practitioners in international assignments: An assessment of success and the influence of organizational and national cultures. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 14(1), 78-100. doi:10.1108/13563280910931090
- Eisenberg, E., & Goodall, H. L. (1997). *Organisational communication* (2nd ed.). New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Evans, C., O'Malley Hammersley, G., & Robertson, M. (2001). Assessing the role and efficacy of communication strategies in times of crisis. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 25(6), 297-309. Retrieved from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com>
- Falkenheimer, J., & Heide, M. (2006). Multicultural crisis communication: Towards a social constructionist perspective. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 14(4), 180-189. doi:10.1111/j.1468-5973.2006.00494.x
- Falkenheimer, J., & Heide, M. (2010). Crisis communicators in change: From plans to improvisations. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 512-526). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Fediuk, T. A., Coombs, W. T., & Botero, I. C. (2010). Exploring crisis from a receiver perspective: Understanding stakeholder reactions during crisis events. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 636-656). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Frandsen, F., & Johansen, W. (2010). Crisis communication, complexity, and the cartoon affair: a case study. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 426-448). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Galloway, C. (2004). Appreciative public relations; an alternative to the problem-solution loop. *Prism Journal*, 2(1), 1-6. Retrieved from <http://www.prismjournal.org/>
- Galloway, C., & Kwansah-Aidoo, K. (2005). *Public relations issues and crisis management*. Victoria: Thomson Social Science Press.
- González-Herrero, A., & Pratt, C. B. (1995). How to manage a crisis before – or whenever – it hits. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 10(1), 25-29. Retrieved from <http://www.newsletter-clearinghse.com/>
- Gregory, D. (2008). Communicating in a crisis: A risk management issue. *Journal of Business Continuity & Emergency Planning*, 3(1), 31-37. Retrieved from <http://www.henrystewart.com/>
- Grunig, J. E., Grunig, L. A., Sriramesh, K., Yi-Hui, H., & Lyra, A. (1995). Models of public relations in an international setting. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 7(3), 163-186. Retrieved from <http://www.erlbaum.com/Journals/journals/JPRR/jpr.htm>
- Hale, J. E., Dulek, R. E., & Hale, D. P. (2005). Crisis response - communication challenges. *Journal of Business Communication*, 42(2), 112-134.
doi:10.1177/0021943605274751
- Heath, R. L. (2010). Crisis communication: Defining the beast and de-marginalizing key publics. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 1-13). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Holladay, S. J. (2010). Are they practicing what we are preaching? An investigation of crisis communication strategies in the media coverage of chemical accidents. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 159-180). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Hutchins, H. M., & Wang, J. (2008). Organizational crisis management and human resources development: A review of the literature and implications to HRD research and practice. *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 10*(3), 310-330. doi:10.1177/1523422308316183
- Jaques, T. (2010). Reshaping crisis management: The challenge for organizational design. *Organizational Development Journal, 28*(1), 9-17. Retrieved from <http://www.odinstitute.org>
- Kent, M. L. (2010). What is a public relations “crisis”? Refocusing crisis research. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 705-712). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Keyton, J. (2005). *Communication and organizational culture*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Ki, E.-J., & Shin, J.-H. (2005). The status of organization-public relationship research in public relations: Analysis of published articles between 1985 and 2004. Retrieved from http://content.ebscohost.com/pdf17_20/pdf/2005/137V/26May05/18655926.pdf?T=P&P=AN&K=18655926&EbscoContent=dGJyMMTo50Sep7Y4yOvsOLCmr0ieqK5Srqm4TbSWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPPk54zj2bmF39%2FsU%2Fipt02u&D=ufh
- Kim, S., Avery, E. J., & Lariscy, R. W. (2009). Are crisis communicators practicing what we preach? An evaluation of crisis response strategies analyzed in public relations research from 1991 to 2009. *Public Relations Review, 35*(4), 446-448. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.08.002
- Lee, B. K. (2004). Audience-oriented approach to crisis communication: A study of Hong Kong Consumers' evaluation of an organizational crisis. *Communication Research, 31*(5), 600-618. doi: 10.1177/0093650204267936
- Lindlof, T., & Taylor, B. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Liu, B. F., & Horsley, J. S. (2007). The government communication decision wheel: Toward a public relations model for the public sector. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 19*(4), 377-393. doi:10.1080/10627260701402473
- Massey, J., & Larson, J. P. (2006). Crisis management in real time: How to successfully plan for and respond to a crisis. *Journal of Promotion Management, 12*(3/4), 63-97. doi:10.1300/J057v12n03•06
- Mitroff, I. (2004). "Think like a sociopath, act like a saint". *Journal of Business Strategy, 25*(5), 42-53. Retrieved from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com>
- Nathan, M. (2000). The paradoxical nature of crisis. *Review of Business, 21*(3/4), 12-16. Retrieved from <http://www.stjohns.edu/>
- Nikolaev, A. G. (2010). Thirty common basic elements of crisis management plans: Guidelines for handling the acute stage of "hard" emergencies at the tactical level. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 261-281). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Park, S.-A., & Len-Rios, M. E. (2010). Who suffers? The effect of injured party on attributions of crisis responsibility. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 591-606). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Parsons, W. (1996). Crisis management. *Career Development International, 1*(5), 26-28. doi:10.1108/13620439610130614
- Pearson, C. M., & Clair, J. A. (1998). Reframing crisis management. *Academy of Management Review, 23*(1), 59-76. Retrieved from <http://www.aom.pace.edu/amr/>
- Pearson, C. M., & Mitroff, I. I. (1993). From crisis prone to crisis prepared: A framework for crisis management. *Academy of Management Executive, 7*(1), 48-59. Retrieved from <http://journals.aomonline.org/amp/>
- Penrose, J. M. (2000). The role of perception in crisis planning. *Public Relations Review, 26*(2), 155-171. doi:10.1016/S0363-8111(00)00038-2
- Piele, L., Rubin, A., & Rubin, R. (2005). *Communication research: Strategies and sources* (6th ed.). Toronto: Thompson Wadsworth.

- Quarantelli, E. L. (1988). Disaster crisis management: A summary of research findings. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25(4), 373-385. Retrieved from <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/>
- Reid, J. (2000). *Crisis management*. New York: John Wiley and Sons
- Reinard, J. (2001). *Introduction to communication research* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Sapriel, C. (2003). Effective crisis management: Tools and best practice for the new millennium. *Journal of Communication Management*, 7(4), 348-355. Retrieved from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com>
- Seeger, M. (2006). Best practices in crisis communication: An expert panel process. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 34(3), 232-244.
doi:10.1080/00909880600769944
- Seeger, M., Ulmer, R., Novak, J. M., & Sellnow, T. (2005). Post-crisis discourse and organizational change, failure and renewal. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 18(1), 78-95. Retrieved from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com>
- Sellnow, T. L., & Vidoloff, K. G. (2009). Getting crisis communication right. *Food Technology*, 63(9), 40-45. Retrieved from <http://www.ift.org/>
- Seon-Kyoung, A., & I-Huei, C. (2010). Crisis communication research in public relations journals: Tracking research trends over thirty years. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 65-90). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Shrivastava, P., Mitroff, I., Miller, D., & Miglani, A. (1988). Understanding industrial crises. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25(4), 285-303. Retrieved from <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/>
- Sison, M. D. (2009). Whose cultural values? Exploring public relations' approaches to understanding audiences. *PRism Journal*, 6(2), 1-13. Retrieved from <http://www.prismjournal.org/>

- Stephens, K. K., & Malone, P. (2010). New media for crisis communication: Opportunities for technical translation, dialogue, and stakeholder responses. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 381-395). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Sterne, G., D. (2008). Business perceptions of public relations in New Zealand. *Journal of Communication Strategy*, 12(1), 30-50. doi:10.1108/13632540810854226
- Stewart, T. (2002). *Principles of research in communication*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Sturges, D., L. (1994). Communicating through crisis: A strategy for organizational survival. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 7(3), 297-316. doi: 10.1177/0893318994007003004
- Taylor, M. (2000). Cultural variance as a challenge to global public relations: A case study of the Coca-Cola scare in Europe. *Public Relations Review*, 26(3), 277-293. doi:10.1016/S0363-8111(00)00048-5
- Taylor, M. (2010). Toward a holistic organizational approach to understanding crisis. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 699-704). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Tracy, K. (2007). The discourse of crisis in public meetings: Case study of a school district's multimillion dollar error. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 35(4), 418-441. doi:10.1080/00909880701617133
- Ulmer, R. R. (2001). Effective crisis management through established stakeholder relationships: Malden Mills as a case study. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 14(4), 590-615. doi:10.1177/0893318901144003
- Ulmer, R. R., Sellnow, T. L., & Seeger, M. W. (2007). *Effective crisis communication*. Thousand Oakes: Sage Publications.
- Ulmer, R. R., Sellnow, T. L., & Seeger, M.W. (2010). Considering the future of crisis communication research: Understanding the opportunities inherent to crisis events through the discourse of renewal. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *The handbook of crisis communication*. (pp. 691-697). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Wise, K. (2003). The Oxford incident: Organizational culture's role in an Anthrax crisis. *Public Relations Review*, 29(4), 461-472. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2003.02.007

STATEMENT OF PERMISSION

I, *Name* / *Role* / *Organisation*

give

Natascha Pancic permission to use articles published on the *Organisation's* website for her research project on crisis communication.

I have been briefed by the researcher on the project, and understand *my Organisation's* involvement.

Signature: Date:

Crisis communication in Theory and Practice

My name is Natascha Pancic. I am currently enrolled in the Master of International Communication programme at Unitec New Zealand. To complete the degree I have to conduct a research project and write a thesis. My research topic evaluates crisis communication in Australia and New Zealand in terms of cultural influences, stakeholder relevance, and strategy applicability.

The aim of my project:

I would like to find out how regional or organisational culture influences the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies and how much consideration is given to internal and external stakeholders. Furthermore I would like to evaluate the usefulness of research on crisis communication for practitioners work. By taking part in this research project, you will be helping me to understand the factors influencing crisis communication in practice.

I request your participation in the following way:

I would like to interview you and talk about:

- How culture influences crisis communication and its effectiveness
- How different circumstances such as size, structure, or industry of the organisation influence crisis communication and the applicability of communication strategies
- How stakeholders are considered in crisis communication in your experience

Your interview will take about 30 to 45 minutes and we will meet at a place agreed upon earlier. I will, with your permission, audiotape the interviews and transcribe them later. All features that could identify you will be removed and the tapes used will be erased once the transcription is done.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. The interview questions will be sent to you two weeks in advance to give you enough time for preparation. You can still withdraw from the project once the interview took place. Any withdrawals must be done within two weeks after the summary of the interview has been sent to you for approval.

Your name and information that may identify you or your organisation will be kept completely confidential and anonymous. All information collected from you will be stored on a password protected computer at Unitec New Zealand for five years and can only be accessed by me and my supervisors.

Please contact me if you have any concerns about the project, via email (natascha_pancic@web.de) or phone (+64-21 02392913). You may also contact my supervisors at Unitec New Zealand. My supervisors are Deborah Rolland, email drolland@unitec.ac.nz or phone +64-9-815 4321 ext. 8361 and Edgar Mason, email emason@unitec.ac.nz or phone +64-9-815 4321 ext. 8798.

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER 2010-1071

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 28 April 2010 to 27 April 2011. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (phone +64-9-815 4321 ext. 7248). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

- Crisis communication in Theory and Practice -

Interview Questions I

Background information

How many years have you worked in PR?

Have you worked in other countries than Australia/New Zealand?

How many crisis cases have you worked on/or how many percent of your every day work is related to crisis communication?

With how many companies (in percent) did you have pre-existing business relationships before you were consulted for crisis management advice?

Does it make a difference for your work?

Can it affect the success of the crisis strategy?

Did the companies you were hired by have their own PR departments?

Where their PR departments not able to handle the crisis?

What are the main differences between crisis communication and general PR?

How would you define crisis?

Research shows that practitioners often think the term crisis is overused. What do you think?

Culture (national/regional/organizational culture)

Does national/regional culture affect crisis communication?

Does organisational culture/structure affect crisis communication?

Are there differences in crisis communications if government institutions or corporate organisations are affected?

Are there limitations to strategy use in the case of small or medium-sized organisations?

Are the limitations to media use in small companies?

Does crisis communication alter in different circumstances?

Is there some kind of worst type scenario of crisis?

- Crisis communication in Theory and Practice -

Interview Questions II

Applicability of strategies

How do internationally successful strategies work in Australia/New Zealand?

Are there differences in strategy usability between Australia and New Zealand (would a New Zealand strategy also work in Australia and vice versa)?

How do strategies developed in multinational headquarters work for Australian subsidiaries?

Is there one strategy or a combination of strategies which have been proven to be the most useful (best practice approach)?

What is the worst strategy or combination of strategies to use?

Have you recognized certain changes or trends in crisis communication in Australia or internationally in the last five years? If yes, what implications does it have in practice?

Does crisis communication in Australia differ from other countries?

Stakeholder consideration

How important is the stakeholder perspective in your every day work?

Do you differentiate between internal and external stakeholders?

Do you have ways to check how stakeholders react to crisis response strategies?

On a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 being least important and 5 being most important) how important for your work are the following audiences:

- Organisation (management, shareholders)
- Internal stakeholders
- External stakeholders
- Other (who, where is media)

Why do you think most research is done from the organisation's perspective? Do you think the stakeholder perspective has any relevance in practice?

- Crisis communication in Theory and Practice -

Interview Questions III

Usefulness of academic research for practitioners

What relevance does academic research have in your every day work or your overall planning/approach?

What is your main source for information/further training/professional development?

How often do academic researchers approach you as a practitioner?

In which areas of crisis communication do you see demand for further research?

Research says that practitioners rely rather on their experience than on academic research.

What do you think?