**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

Effective crisis communication management:

Perspectives from public relations and communications practitioners

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ABSTRACT

Crises are occurring in organisations with increasing frequency and yet organisations have not learnt how to respond effectively during such situations. CEOs and spokespersons need to be vigilant in how they respond during a crisis situation to ensure that their organisation's reputation is not damaged. Despite guidelines being available on how to manage crises, companies do not seem to be responding effectively in their crisis communications.

A literature review was conducted to identify best practice. This was then used to compile an *a priori* framework against which practitioner perspectives were explored.

The study was qualitative and exploratory in nature and utilised rich, in-depth and semi-structured interviews held with 14 public relations practitioners and experts.

The principal findings of this study are organised into four main areas: the strategies that organisations need to follow to perform effective crisis communication; the organisational drivers that enable effective crisis communication; the organisational drivers that prevent effective crisis communication; and the behaviours that characterise effective crisis communication management.
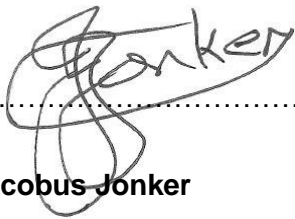
The study has provided new insights into effective crisis communication, as the findings show that there are gaps or anomalies between recommendations in scholarly literature and practitioner recounts of practice. The study concludes by providing recommendations for future research and guidelines for practitioners.

KEYWORDS

Crisis communication, crisis management, reputation management, social media

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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1.1. Introduction

Corporate crises are occurring with greater frequency. Some 30% of chief executive officers (CEOs) are expecting at least one crisis to affect their companies in the next three years (PWC, 2016). This is concerning, as damage to reputation or brand has been rated as the number one top risk for companies in the Global Risk Management survey for 2017 (Aon, 2017). Companies, and specifically their directors, therefore need to proactively manage their responses in times of crises to ensure that the latest news is known to stakeholders and that assumptions leading to criticisms in social media are not fuelled due to communication silence or inappropriate responses. Once damage to corporate reputation has occurred, the influence of recovery is determined by the extent of the crisis and how effective the response of the organisation was (Grebe, 2013a).

Crises may be considered as major events or incidents with a potentially disastrous outcome affecting an organisation, and which could result in the turning point of an organisation (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2014). Crises can create risks to the organisation, the public or the environment, and it is therefore critical for companies to understand how to effectively manage a crisis in media (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). Extreme crises could involve significant damage to equipment, property and loss of life, while other crises may occur as a result of inappropriate employee conduct on social media.

The rise of social media has escalated the prevalence of crises far above traditional media (Pang, Begam Binte Abul Hassan, & Chee Yang Chong, 2014). Traditional media, also known by researchers as mass media, only has the capacity for one-way communication, whereas social media's ability for two-way communication means that mass media content creators and stakeholders now have the ability to communicate simultaneously on social media platforms, resulting in exponential content being generated and used (Houston, Hawthorne, Perreault, Hae Park, Hode, Halliwell, Turner McGowen, Davis, Vaid, McElderry, & Griffith, 2014). In the past, a crisis could occur and only a few hours or days later, the world would learn thereof, as it was communicated in traditional media. Journalists no longer need to intervene before the news of a crisis is shared by stakeholders, reaching millions of people worldwide (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). This is largely because reporters are no longer needed when a crisis occurs – the public, or "Netizens" and "citizen

journalists" (Pang et al., 2014), responds and uploads footage and information as it becomes available.

Although social media characteristics may pose as advantageous over mass media for crisis communication, social media is forcing crisis response to be so much more effective than mass media (Houston, et al., 2014). This is due to the speed at which communications is performed on social media. Public relations (PR) practitioners endeavour to define how organisations should respond on social media. However, for communication practitioners to respond with appropriate strategies to effectively advise organisations how to respond on social media during a crisis, PR practitioners should be aware of how crises develop within the social media environment (Pang et al., 2014). PR practitioners are seen to perform public relations tasks contracting for an organisation, whereas communication practitioners work within an organisation. Although one person external and the other internal to an organisation, both perform the same function.

The dialogue process to be used for effective crisis communication is just as important as the proposed guidelines to ensure that trust, credibility and successful communication with stakeholders is obtained (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). If companies follow these normative guidelines from scholars and PR practitioners to respond effectively in social media communication, then companies should not be exposed to corporate reputation damage. Although most PR practitioners agree that social media now influences mass media news coverage, very few have incorporated social media response plans into their organisation's risk management plans (Veil et al., 2011).

This is concerning as the use of social media platforms is growing exponentially. As at the fourth quarter 2017, Facebook had 2.2 billion monthly active users, while at the third quarter 2017, Twitter had 330 million monthly active users (Statista, 2018). Sites such as Twitter have the capability to deliver instantaneous information, even in the absence of mass media (Wasike, 2013). Collaboration, user inter-activity, community, conversation, multimedia capability and the lack of gatekeeping are general characteristics of the application of social media (Munnukka & Järvi, 2014; Siah Ann Mei, Bansal, & Pang, 2010). However, these are also seen as its "Achilles' heel" (Siah Ann Mei et al., 2010, p. 143).

Most scholars agree that the best way to manage a crisis is to prevent one from happening (Pang et al., 2014, p. 112). PR practitioners need to actively monitor their clients' social media presence and mitigate social media fires by acting quickly with PR crisis communication (Le, 2017). Despite numerous guidelines being available on how to manage crises (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016), companies do not seem to be responding effectively in their crisis communication. Recent reported cases of poor crisis management on the part of large corporates including Ford, MTN, KPMG and Tiger Brands are concerning.

One such example is Ford's management of the crisis which erupted when 46 confirmed Ford Kuga vehicles burst into flames in several incidents, allegedly also resulting in one death (Branquinho, 2017). Ford's failure to take immediate action and recall the Kuga models was distressing, as incidents dated back to 2014. Ford has been vague about the root cause and is not taking accountability for the engineering flaw in the Kuga. Ford is still acknowledging the situation and has responded that they need further opportunity to conclude their investigations (Ramphele, 2017). If Ford was serious about performing effective crisis communication, especially after so many incidents, they would have taken a stand to respond correctly and at least recall all the Kuga vehicles spanning the problematic 2012-2014 models, ensuring the safety of their consumers and the public.

MTN was another large corporation that found itself in the media spotlight. The response on social media of the executive director for group communications to discussions following MTN's reported reckless corporate conduct in Nigeria caused harm to MTN's corporate reputation (Moeng, 2015). Observers may argue that whoever advised MTN on reputational risks and communications should have counselled the executive team on how to respond and what to say. However, this did not appear to happen.

KPMG is another example. The political scandal that triggered in South Africa between ex-President Jacob Zuma and the Gupta family resulted in eight senior executives from the KPMG division in South Africa being dismissed in September 2017 (Cotterill, 2017). Cotterill (2017) further stated in the Financial Times that this was after several warnings were received by KPMG's South Africa CEO, Trevor Hoole, regarding the integrity and ethics of the 15-year relationship with the Guptas (Cotterill, 2017). Notwithstanding Hoole resigning in September 2017, this scandal has further implicated and brought down the United Kingdom PR company Bell Pottinger (Pilling, 2017) for their racially charged campaigning

for the Gupta family. This scandal also implicated Heather Kerzner, who owns 37% of Bell Pottinger (Brown, 2017). The domino effect of scandalous connections to KPMG has devoured its corporate reputation since the news broke of the scandal. Large companies have since terminated their contracts with KPMG South Africa, resulting in significant damage to this global brand.

Tiger Brands recently also faced massive reputational risk as a result of what is known now as the biggest listeria outbreak the world has ever seen, allegedly resulting in the deaths of 199 South African people and causing 1,019 laboratory-confirmed Listeriosis cases (NLIMT, 2018). The Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, confirmed on 4 March 2018 from laboratory tests performed at the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) Centre that the illnesses of nine children at a Soweto crèche in January 2018 were linked to the Tiger Brands food production facility at Polokwane. On 5 March 2018, Tiger Brands recalled all their Enterprise products from the retail market. By mid-April 2018, after the Listeriosis has escalated to unfathomable proportions, Tiger Brands CEO, Lawrence MacDougall, was still not acknowledging responsibility (Van Zyl, 2018).

Months after the incident first began, Mr MacDougall made his infamous statement, "there has been no direct correlation between our products and the deaths yet" (Knowler, 2018, p. 1). Tiger Brands then announced seven weeks later, on Tuesday 24 April 2018, that "independent tests have confirmed the presence of the LST6 listeria strain in samples taken from its Enterprise Polokwane processed meat factory" (Knowler, 2018, p. 1). For 50 days during this crisis response period, Tiger Brands failed to respond truthfully. Tiger Brands is, however, experiencing serious reputational damage not just for this Listeriosis storm, which started 14 months previously (Struweg, 2018), but also for the way it handled this incident, especially as far as South African babies and infants are concerned (Child, 2018). The company's lack of compassion has made it come across as cold and unsympathetic to the public (Struweg, 2018).

By performing exploratory interviews with PR practitioners who have managed crisis communication for various companies and comparing their accounts of crisis management with the normative approaches advocated in the scholarly literature, this study explores why there are gaps or anomalies between what literature recommends companies should do in effective crisis communication and what companies appear to be doing in practice.

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1.2. Research Problem

The challenge presenting itself is to understand why companies fail to follow normative guidelines for crisis management, despite literature and PR practitioners saying companies should respond in a specific way to ensure minimal damage to corporate reputation. Companies should then assimilate the proposed recommendations so that their outcome does not lead to negative consequences.

The objective of this research was to firstly develop a literature-derived normative model to guide effective communication during a corporate crisis. The second objective was to compare and contrast the perspectives of PR practitioners with the literature-derived guidelines. The third objective of this study was to understand why companies fail to adhere to these normative guidelines. The fourth and final objective was to develop a prescriptive framework of key principles to be utilised by companies during crisis communication.

1.3. Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research was to understand why there are gaps or anomalies between what the literature recommends companies should do in effective crisis communication and what companies appear to be doing in practice. This research was executed by performing exploratory interviews with PR practitioners, communications practitioners and journalists who have managed crisis communication for various different companies.

1.3.1. Academic Justification

Research has been conducted on the use of social media and mass media in crisis communication (Houston, et al., 2014). Various studies have been researched on the influence of crisis communication and the effect on corporate reputation (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). Further studies have been performed on how the engagement on social media and mass media impacts corporate reputation (Pang et al., 2014), as well as studies relating to reputation management strategies and tactics to respond following crises on social media (Grebe, 2013a). Image Restoration Theory has also been researched to evaluate what the correct communication response is to ensure that negative reactions to a crisis do not occur (Coombs, 2007; Ott & Theunissen, 2015). There have been PR practitioner recommendations and academic research in the field of what companies should be doing, by following a descriptive normative approach to crisis management (Coombs,

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2007; Floreddu, Cabiddu, & Evaristo, 2014; Ott & Theunissen, 2015; Seeger, 2006; Veil et al., 2011; Xu & Wu, 2017). However, there is little empirical research that links the normative perspective to behavioural practice. This research thus contributes to the scholarship of practice, to deepen our understanding of what happens when companies are required to communicate during crises and what the response of companies during crisis communication should be, as well as to reconcile normative theory with practice.

1.3.2. Business Rationale

This research is valuable to business in understanding how to identify whether there are gaps in their response strategies during crisis communication. This research will also allow companies to identify how to respond effectively in practice, using normative guidelines, following a crisis situation. To assist business in identifying what crisis response strategies should be utilised, this research has developed a framework of key principles, based on learnings and practical knowledge from experts, to ensure quality and efficiency is achieved in the recommended response principles (Veil et al., 2011).

1.4. Scope of the Research

The scope of this research is restricted to understanding what factors enable effective crisis communication and the organisational drivers that enable or prevent companies in their response to crisis communication. Some companies rely on their own internal response, while others rely on PR companies to respond on their behalf. Although various literature studies have been performed regarding crisis communication worldwide, very little research has been performed regarding a comparison of normative guidelines to crisis response and what companies actually appear to be doing in practice.

Once a crisis occurs, there is so much more to manage than just the response and communication of the crisis. This paper will, however, focus primarily on effective crisis communication and not the other aspects of crises.

In addition, the scope is limited to the South African context of organisations and how they respond during crisis communications. This could be different in other countries due to the maturity of companies or the learnings derived from organisations that have experienced crisis communication in the past.

Finally, this scope will revolve around the experience of PR practitioners, communications practitioners and journalists in their involvement with companies during crises, and not with the companies themselves.

1.5. Conclusion

This chapter has presented an introduction into understanding how companies should respond in times of crisis. It was highlighted that a gap exists between how PR practitioners recommend companies respond and how companies are responding in practice. The introduction suggests that companies should be using defined positive strategies on how to respond during a crisis, rather than provide sub-standard responses that lead to double crises, which negatively affect their corporate reputation.

Following this introductory chapter, the research paper proceeds into Chapter Two, which presents an overview of the literature reviewed relating to effective crisis communication. Chapter Three then displays the research questions derived from the literature study, while Chapter Four outlines the methodology followed to perform the data collection and analysis. Chapter Five presents the findings from the data and Chapter Six the discussion on the results found. Chapter Seven concludes with the academic and business findings as derived from the data analysis. This paper concludes with final recommendations and proposals for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The literature review aims to focus on the academic basis for this research and provides insight into the existing theories and literature developed to assist in framing the research questions in Chapter Three.

The literature review is structured as follows:

Firstly, a review of literature is undertaken to understand the characteristics of crises that currently occur in organisations. Different types of crises require different response strategies from organisations, which is essential for PR practitioners to know prior to initiating the response. Recent academic literature was reviewed to determine the nature of crises to which organisations need to respond.

Secondly, the principles of effective crisis communication are reviewed. Depending on the crisis type and intensity, organisations need to decide what strategy or approach will be taken to manage their crisis communication. The best practices of effective crisis communication were also researched to understand what organisations should be doing.

Thirdly, the communication mediums used in driving crisis communication are reviewed and social media communication strategies are discussed. Traditionally, crisis communication was driven as a one-way communication medium via mass media, though today organisations are driving two-way communication through social media. Social media is clearly overpowering mass media in crisis communication as more and more companies are focussing on their crisis response strategies and their policies for responding via social media. Different forms of engagement will be discussed in engaging with stakeholders to understand the impact on their crisis response.

Fourthly, reputation management during crisis communication is reviewed. Although organisations aim to reduce and contain harm following an incident, the strategy followed and the form of engagement taken on by the organisation determines the effect of the possible corporate reputational damage as an outcome to the crisis communication. The form of engagement utilised via social media will determine the emotional response from

the public and stakeholders. This will set the tone if the crisis has a low effect on corporate reputation or if the crisis could lead to another crisis taking place due to the poor response strategy followed.

Lastly, the aim was to develop new best practices that constitute effective crisis communication by reviewing academic literature regarding response strategies to be followed during crisis communication. This led to the research questions and research methodology as presented in Chapters Three and Four respectively.

2.2. Characteristics of Corporate Crises

PWC (2016) has observed that corporate crises have become more prevalent and are increasing in frequency. Moreover, CEOs predict that they will experience more than one crisis in the coming three years, even though they have already experienced up to five crises in the past three years (PWC, 2016). Coombs (2015) states, however, that it is better to prevent a crisis from happening, as stakeholders will not be harmed. If issues develop within an organisation, it is important for management to handle these issues and mitigate them before they escalate and result in a crisis (Coombs, 2015). If sufficient risk management plans are established in an organisation and crisis managers are managing crisis warning signs, then the possibility of a crisis occurring will be mitigated (Coombs, 2015). However, it is no longer a case of whether corporate crises will happen but rather, when they will happen (PWC, 2016). When a crisis occurs it creates uncertainty within society and it is thus essential for crisis managers to have established policies and procedures in place to manage crisis situations (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). To this end, PR practitioners need to understand the different characteristics of crises to ensure that the most effective crisis management strategies are developed (Kim, 2013).

2.2.1. Crisis Origin

It is important to establish where the crisis originated: internally within the organisation or externally to the organisation (Jin et al., 2014). This internal or external crisis origination is referred to by Kim (2013) as the corporation's controllability. Once the origin has been determined, the crisis response strategy will follow accordingly. Depending on the crisis response strategy followed by the organisation, this will determine if the public's response is sympathetic to the organisation or if it is negative (Jin et al., 2014).

2.2.2. Crisis Type

Of all the characteristics of crises, various scholars have given attention to crisis type (Coombs, 2015; Jin et al., 2014; Kim, 2013). Up to four different crisis types have been identified by scholars, namely transgression, accident, victim and faux pas (Jin et al., 2014; Kim, 2013; Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013). These are summarised by the author in Table 1.

Table 1

Crisis types

		Corporation's Controllability (Origin)	
		Internal	**External**
Corporation's Intentionality	**Intentional**	Transgression	Victim (terrorism)
	Unintentional	Accident	Faux pas (mistake)

The public will be more lenient towards an accident crisis which occurred unintentionally than a transgression crisis which was performed with intention (Kim, 2013). When a risk is known and someone voluntarily performs an act leading to a transgression crisis, the public has less sympathy for such a crisis (Wendling, Radisch, & Jacobzone, 2013). In the case of intentional crises, the public will respond more negatively towards the organisation and on social media (Utz et al., 2013). The crisis response strategy for such a crisis is very difficult to manage as the perceived responsibility is high (Utz et al., 2013). Utz et al. (2013) established in their research that crisis type affects anger, and anger is regarded as the strongest emotion on the internet (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). It is therefore important to distinguish between the crisis types when an incident occurs, as this then determines the requirements for effective crisis communication (Seeger, 2006).

2.2.3. Crisis Intensity

The intensity of a crisis is determined by the crisis situation, which is classified by the threat level, the response option available, the time pressure and the degree of control that the organisation has (Kim, 2013).

Table 2

Crisis intensity

	Threat Level	Response Option	Time Pressure	Degree of Control
Crisis	High	Few	Intense	Low
Incident	Low	Many	Minimal	High

Source: Kim (2013)

As shown in Table 2, when a crisis occurs, the threat level is high compared to an incident or issue that is low. Due to the extent of a crisis, the response options would be few and the time pressure would be intense. Finally, because an incident or issue has escalated into a crisis, the degree of control over the crisis would be low. In this case, the crisis communication response plan, strategies, policies and procedures need to be defined and ready to execute (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). In most cases it is valuable to ensure that crisis communication plans in the organisation have been communicated and that exercises have been held with spokespersons (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). This is very important as the way a crisis is communicated shapes the public's perception of the organisation, which inevitably could lead to damaging corporate reputation (Floreddu et al., 2014). During a crisis, the information is transferred by means of a medium to the public, who will process this information and, depending on the crisis type, will act on this information differently to when it is a normal incident that does not affect them (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014).

Crises are becoming more prevalent today due to the growth of social media (Veil et al., 2011). Yet, despite possible guidelines being available on how to manage crises, companies are not responding effectively in their crisis communication. It is therefore valuable for PR practitioners to understand the crisis origin, the crisis type and the crisis intensity when they engage with their clients to respond appropriately during the crisis communication (Grégoire, Salle, & Tripp, 2015).

2.3. Principles of Effective Crisis Communication

The most critical component of crisis management is defined by Coombs and Holladay (2010) as crisis communication. Extensive attention has been given to crisis management

by scholars in suggesting descriptive normative approaches to crisis communication (Coombs, 2015; Reynolds & Seeger, 2014; Seeger, 2006). Crisis communication has been broadly defined by Coombs and Holladay (2010, p. 20) as "the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation". Crisis communication has also beed defined to follow a life-cycle of different phases during the stages of a crisis (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014), as shown in Appendix A.

The Initial Phase is the most critical in effective communication as this is the first communication with the public following the crisis, where the incident needs to be acknowledged with empathy. After the initial communication, the Maintenance Phase is used to disseminate more information regarding the incident, follow up on response plans and communicate with all stakeholders. The Resolution Phase of crisis communication allows the organisation to start closing off the incident. The public and victims should receive closure and the organisation should be taking the learnings from the incident and the responses and applying it to their policies and procedures to ensure the process is improved.

Crisis communication is critical in ensuring that the stakeholders, as well as the corporation, are protected from further distress (Coombs, Frandsen, Holladay, & Johansen, 2010). It is critical for companies to have the most essential principles in crisis communication to improve the quality and efficiency in response communication (Kim, 2013; Veil et al., 2011). Previously, crisis communication was regarded by scholars merely as a variable in the process, whereas today, scholars in public relations and communication regard crisis communication as the key component to crisis management (Coombs & Holladay, 2010).

Basing authenticity on ethical values and trust is regarded as one of the key principles in managing crisis communication by companies, together with proactive reputation management strategies and tactics (Sisson & Bowen, 2017). Moreover, to ensure effective response to the public by companies, authenticity is regarded by Sisson and Bowen (2017) as a key principle. It is crucial for companies to act ethically in their dealings with society to ensure they do not damage their social licence to operate (Bowen, Hung-Baesecke, & Chen, 2016; Sisson & Bowen, 2017).

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Communication during a crisis requires a different mind-set to normal operations, as everyone in the organisation is in shock mode. The basic understanding of what is happening is not realised by everyone and the means to rebuild the corporate reputation as it was prior to the crisis is not always available to everyone within the organisation (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). If an organisation wants to survive the crisis and ensure success is obtained, it is critical for an organisation to ensure that crisis communication plans are in place and understood by everyone key to managing the crisis (Kim, 2013). Once the safety of all stakeholders has been secured through effective crisis communication, the organisation can work on communicating information to limit the reputational damage that may be caused (Coombs et al., 2010). Information dissemination is best produced by using social media during a crisis situation and therefore organisations need to ensure that best practices for using social media are aligned with their crisis communication plans (Brynielsson, Granasen, Lindquist, Quijano, Nilsson, & Trnka, 2017).

The strategy to be followed during a crisis determines the crisis communication plan and needs to be generic and not a step-by-step process, as each crisis differs in type and intensity (Houston, et al., 2014; Seeger, 2006). PR and communications practitioners need to understand the impact if crisis communication is not achieved effectively because the possibility exists that crisis communication can rebound if not managed effectively and could cause serious reputational damage (Kim, 2013; Xu & Wu, 2017). Reynolds and Seeger (2014) have developed a Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) model that defines how crisis communication strategies and planning should be designed to identify the critical tasks during the initial phase of a crisis.

2.3.1. Strategies in Crisis Communication

As mentioned before, the crisis communication strategy to be used is dependent on the crisis type and intensity. This needs to be correct as the relationship between the crisis communication strategies has direct influence on the corporate reputation (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). The chosen strategy must also take into consideration the reputational level of the organisation, being either low, medium or high (Floreddu et al., 2014). Crisis communication strategies have three objectives to ensure the level of reputation is protected. Firstly, to shape the origin of the crisis; secondly, to change the perception of the crisis with the stakeholders; and lastly, to reduce the negative affect caused by the crisis (Coombs, 2007). Crisis communication strategies are made up of two parts: the strategic

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message to be transmitted and the medium to be used (Xu & Wu, 2017). Different approaches need to be taken for the strategic message, depending on the crisis type. In instances of high threat levels (Table 2), the organisation should take an accommodative approach such as apologising or compensating, whereas in the case of a lower threat level, a diminishing approach should be followed (Utz et al., 2013). Organisations should guard against using a defensive or legalistic approach, as this strategy could make the situation worse (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Grebe, 2013a).

2.3.1.1.   Defensive Strategy

In most crises today, a defensive or denial approach is the most common strategy that is unknowingly followed by organisations (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). Organisations immediately take a defensive or legalistic approach following the crisis, causing the damage of the original crisis to evolve into self-inflicted reputational damage (Grebe, 2013b). Organisations and attorneys argue that if the legal department is not involved in a crisis, it will suffer financial or reputational damage and run the risk of being held liable (Coombs, 2007). The problem is that PR practitioners and attorneys do not always agree on the best approach to follow, resulting in attorneys being over-legalistic in their proposed communications and opting for "no comment" communication (Grebe, 2013b). Organisations are prompted into using defensive strategies and pursue denial and absent approaches that normally fail to meet stakeholder or public expectations, resulting in another crisis with which they must deal (Grebe, 2013b). This resulting crisis, referred to by Grebe (2013b, p. 71) as a "double-crisis" and which can only be defused by following up with a public apology, is defined as an accommodative strategy.

2.3.1.2.   Accommodative Strategy

A highly accommodative strategy is usually not preferred by organisations as it could lead to legitimate legal liabilities and financial risks (Coombs et al., 2010; Grebe, 2013a). Accommodative strategies include being apologetic, showing sympathy and sometimes even compensating for the damage to ensure corporate reputation is not harmed, but indicating to the affected parties that the organisation is taking responsibility for the crisis and conveying its concern (Utz et al., 2013). Social media is often used as the primary form of the accommodative strategy between the organisation and the stakeholders, to enable stakeholders to respond, forward and discuss the messages with the organisation (Utz et

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al., 2013). This creates a platform where the organisation incorporates sympathy in its crisis communication strategy; the most important component of crisis communication being to ensure that the trust relationship is restored with stakeholders and that the anger within the public is subdued (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Xu & Wu, 2017).

An insincere apology or conveying false information can fuel an emotional situation caused by the crisis, leading to stakeholders becoming angry as they may feel the organisation is being dishonest or not taking up its responsibilities (Grebe, 2013b). As noted by Kim (2013), it is important for an organisation to ensure there is consistent communication during a crisis, as this is critical to the viability of the organisation. Where an accommodative strategy is utilised, this can have a positive outcome on the organisation, and the crisis, although not forgotten, will have little impact on the reputation of the organisation (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). If organisations are genuine in using an accommodative strategy during crisis communication, the intention will be to provide a means for two-way communication mostly via social media. Twitter is one example of two-way communication through which stakeholders can engage (Xu & Wu, 2017). When organisations use one-way communication via mass media, they tend to follow a defensive strategy to stay absent in their communications (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). Stakeholders will, however, not wait for organisations which choose to take an approach of absence; rather, they will find platforms to actively obtain information and participate accordingly in conversations (Brynielsson, et al., 2017). Such conversations can lead to the risk of damaging the organisation's reputation if they are not managed correctly (Floreddu et al., 2014).

Using the correct strategy during crisis communication indicates how important it is for PR practitioners to understand the different concepts. Even more important for PR practitioners is the need to understand the best practices of effective crisis communication, as it is so easy to get this wrong and run the risk of further damaging the organisation's reputation.

2.3.2. Behaviours that Characterise Effective Crisis Communication

Reynolds and Seeger (2014, p. 56) identified the crucial elements of successful crisis communication from the CERC model in Figure 1. Successful crisis communication is achieved if the stakeholders have obtained credibility and trust in the information disseminated. Credibility in crisis communication, which is a fundamental persuasive attribute (Eberle, Berens, & Li, 2013), is established when the intention of the message to the stakeholder is true, the message is communicated with expertise, and the message can

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be trusted (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). As stated by Grebe (2013a, p. 81), "Successful crisis management is more than just damage control".
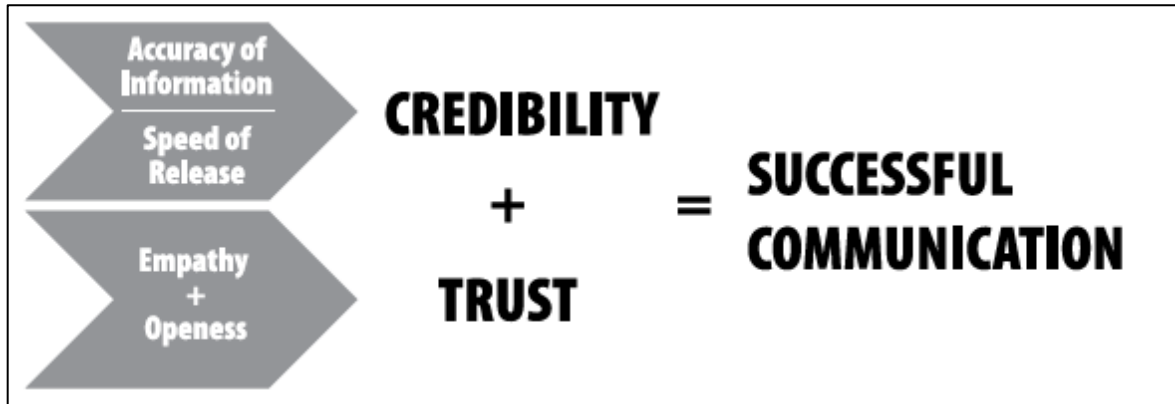
Figure 1. **CERC Model: Elements of Successful Communication**
Source: Reynolds and Seeger (2014, p. 56)

It is therefore important that the accuracy of information is given special attention prior to communicating the message. It is essential for a PR or communications practitioner to obtain the facts from credible sources and to ensure that all the facts are correct (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). The practitioner then needs to repeat the facts as often as possible during the communication but to avoid giving unconfirmed details early on in the communication if all the facts are not known yet (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014).

This makes it difficult for PR practitioners to respond with speed of communication when all the facts have not yet been verified but are still accurate (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). If an organisation stays absent from communicating after a crisis, it may be perceived by stakeholders that the organisation is either hiding information or is not interested. It is essential for the organisation to have a proper formulated crisis communication plan and to respond first and be the primary source of information, thereby establishing good first impressions with their stakeholders (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). Speedy communication suggests that the organisation has policies and procedures in place and is in control of the situation, whereas absence verifies denial (Ott & Theunissen, 2015).

The very first impressions with stakeholders should include empathy and compassion, as this immediately establishes a form of acceptance with affected stakeholders (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). If an organisation is open and honest in its communication, it will establish

sympathy with the stakeholders, which is the most important aspect of crisis communication (Xu & Wu, 2017).

It is important to choose the correct spokesperson for the crisis communication as they need to convey information with honesty, candour and openness to ensure trust is built with the public (Veil et al., 2011). Although not all the information is always known and uncertainty may exist, the spokesperson should prepare for the communication such that sufficient credible information is shared, as this establishes the first impression following a crisis (Veil et al., 2011). As mentioned by Reynolds and Seeger (2014) in their CERC model, it is essential for the spokesperson to be perceived as trustworthy and credible in their communication. Five elements on which spokespersons can focus are recommended in their research: conveying the message with empathy and caring; using a spokesperson with competence and expertise; communicating information with honesty and openness; showing that the organisation is committed and dedicated to resolving the crisis; and taking accountability for the decisions made during the crisis communication (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014; Xu & Wu, 2017).

2.3.3.   Behaviours that Characterise Ineffective Crisis Communication

When it comes to following a defensive strategy, an organisation should not stay quiet in absence (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). Denying responsibility or being over-legalistic will just exacerbate the crisis situation (Grebe, 2013b). As mentioned above, it is essential to convey credible information that has been checked for accuracy and not to disseminate information that has mixed or conflicting messages (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). Reynolds and Seeger (2014) further state that critical information should not be released late or over-promising commitments made if they have not been verified or cannot be delivered upon. All information disseminated via social media and which could be rumours or myths should be rectified by the spokesperson. In addition, spokespersons should portray proper behaviour, not using inappropriate humour, responding with a lack of empathy or conveying inaccurate information. Public power struggles should be avoided and all conflicts should be taken offline into individual conversations with the organisation (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014; Xu & Wu, 2017). Lastly, Reynolds and Seeger (2014) state that the message should be disseminated such that the perception is not created of preferential treatment among certain stakeholders.

2.3.4. The Goals of Effective Crisis Communication

The most important goal of effective crisis communication is to restore the reputation of the organisation and win back the trust of stakeholders (Utz et al., 2013). Seeger (2006) states in his research, however, that the universal goal to effective crisis communication is to reduce and contain harm, something iterated by other scholars (Brynielsson, et al., 2017; Reynolds & Seeger, 2014; Wasike, 2013). Organisations could, however, have conflicting goals, as most lawyers would want to mitigate the risk of financial loss and legal claims.

2.4. Communication Media in Driving Crisis Communication

The use of specific communication mediums influences the effect of crisis communication on affected parties (Utz et al., 2013). It is essential to recognise that crisis management is complex, as the crisis can be very dynamic and organisations need to adapt to the situation at hand (Austin, Liu, & Jin, 2012; Xu & Wu, 2017). Communication mediums used can vary from mass media, also known as traditional media, to social media or offline word-of-mouth communication (Austin et al., 2012). As previously stated, mass media is a platform for one-way communication where consumers can only receive information, whereas social media has created capacity for two-way communication where stakeholders can consume and create content (Etter, Ravasi, & Colleoni, 2017; Houston, et al., 2014; Reynolds & Seeger, 2014).

Social media is an interactive online medium that enables stakeholders to form dialogues with the organisation and which allows for the sharing and creation of content (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). Although interactive communication channels are very effective, organisations still need to monitor these mediums carefully (Eberle et al., 2013). Social media is not only a channel that an organisation can use to provide information or deliver services as a product, as it can also be used for crisis communication (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). Social media can thus be regarded as a crucial component in an organisation's crisis communication plans (Floreddu et al., 2014). It is not an option today for an organisation to neglect integrating social media into its crisis communication plans (Xu & Wu, 2017). That being said, many organisations and crisis managers are currently still not sure how to integrate social media into their crisis communication plans (Brynielsson, et al., 2017). Due to this uncertainty and perceived risks in using social media, many organisations are limiting the use of social media (Munnukka & Järvi, 2014).

The advantages of social media include that it can be used to enhance crisis communication by cooperating and participating with stakeholders; that it is decentralised; that it is prevalent and accessible to everyone, and that it is geographically traceable (Wendling et al., 2013). Social media used as a strategy is also known to provide immediate information; create rapid connections; build dynamic relationships with the media; correct rumours and myths and operate in support of the crisis communication plan that has been developed (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). If used correctly and monitored consistently, social media can provide an online platform for word-of-mouth communication, where informal messages can be conveyed from stakeholders to the organisation (Austin et al., 2012).

2.4.1. Stakeholder Involvement

Social media integrates stakeholders into the crisis communication response as it allows the stakeholders to engage in the crisis response, although most stakeholders are likely already using social media to communicate about the crisis at hand (Veil et al., 2011). It is therefore important to determine the social media forms of engagement in the crisis communication plans to be used by PR practitioners (Veil et al., 2011). With traditional media it was not necessary to interact with the public but with social media it is essential for PR practitioners to engage in dialogue with the public (Wendling et al., 2013). Although many organisations claim to be open to dialogue, very few organisations actually implement this strategy of engagement, as they usually attempt to persuade or negotiate with the stakeholders (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). It is important to create a conversational platform in the dialogue and not to persuade (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). This form of dialogical engagement is only effective if there are many users affected by the crisis, otherwise it may seem as if the organisation is attempting to rally supporters and thereby create anger (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). Depending on the crisis type and intensity, it is sometimes necessary for organisations to take the situation seriously and engage individually with the affected parties to ensure that the crisis does not escalate on social media (Ott & Theunissen, 2015).

Another form of stakeholder engagement that has been researched by Floreddu and Cabiddu (2016) is for the communication strategy to be open or transparent in terms of the organisation's responses. If an organisation is perceived to be hiding or deleting posts following a crisis, this will cause uncertainty and a breakdown in trust with the public. Creating organisational crisis communication plans and defining the transparency strategies to be followed during crisis communication will assist PR practitioners and

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spokespersons to follow correct procedures to ensure that the responses are always transparent on social media (Rokka, Karlsson, & Tienari, 2013). As soon as an organisation is perceived to be secretive in its communication by deleting posts, this creates anger and mistrust with the public and starts damaging the corporate reputation (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). It is valuable for an organisation to rather take on an engagement form of being supportive, by providing information to the stakeholders at all times (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). This strategy should be developed long before a crisis originates within an organisation, thereby building the organisation's reputation with its stakeholders. Once a crisis occurs, it will not be perceived as anything other than supportive by its stakeholders (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016).

2.4.2. Social Media Emotional Response

If PR practitioners are not cognisant of where social media threats are originating, they are unable to manage the various forms of emotions generated via the social media interactions (Grégoire et al., 2015). Positive and negative emotional responses form an important part of crisis communication on social media (Etter et al., 2017). The communication strategy followed by the organisation and the form of engagement taken on for the specific crisis type can lead to emotional responses by the affected stakeholders (Etter et al., 2017). Anger, frustration, sadness, shock, disgust and fright have been researched by scholars as the primary negative emotions that could be initiated in crisis communication responses (Etter et al., 2017; Xu & Wu, 2017). Positive emotions are defined by Etter et al. (2017) as excitement, surprise and joy, and could motivate stakeholders to become more interactive in the dialogue response. Xu and Wu (2017) created their research around incorporating sympathy via social media in crisis communication and show that sympathy and compensation strategies often counter the negative effect that emotional outcomes such as anger and negative word of mouth have on an organisation's reputation. First impressions of crisis communications create perceptions of the organisation in the stakeholders' minds. For organisations to not risk damaging their reputation, PR and communications practitioners should recommend the creation of positive emotions in the affected stakeholders' minds and steer away from negative emotions.

2.5. Organisational Drivers that Enable Organisations to Communicate Effectively during Crisis Communication

Planning is the most important enabler for effective crisis communication (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). Once policies and procedures have been defined in the organisation, it is possible to create hymn sheets for the PR practitioners and spokespersons to use for a specific crisis type. Social media tools, such as monitoring the social media platforms, will assist organisations to know what is happening on social media and what the pre-crisis reputation is of the company (Veil et al., 2011). It is even possible for organisations to use corporate advertising during a crisis situation to disseminate information to the public or stakeholders (Kim, 2013). Although social media platforms today are used frequently for crisis communication, it is still advantageous for organisations to use traditional media as well, as this is perceived to create credibility with stakeholders (Utz et al., 2013).

2.6. Organisational Drivers that Prevent Organisations from Communicating Effectively during Crisis Communication

There are challenges that organisations need to identify, address and define in their policies and procedures to enable effective crisis communication on social media (Wendling et al., 2013). Using mass media in crisis communication is not as complex as the dynamic world of social media communication, which needs to be handled with care and precision. Drivers preventing PR practitioners and spokespersons are identified as risk of financial loss, possible legal claims, the political climate, security protocol and the risk of personal liability (Wendling et al., 2013).

2.7. Reputation Management during Crisis Communication

Reputation is broadly perceived as a valuable, intangible asset formed as a result of an organisation's past behaviour and stakeholders' experience of the organisation (Coombs, 2007; Floreddu et al., 2014). Corporate reputation is shaped over the history of the organisation, how it interacted with its stakeholders and responded to their needs and requests (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). Several scholars have researched the topic of how important it is to manage crisis communication, be it through social media or mass media, to ensure that the effect on corporate reputation is minimised and above all, that it is not negative (Pang et al., 2014; Xu & Wu, 2017). Poorly managed crises have resulted in organisations experiencing a "double crisis" (Grebe, 2013b, p. 71), resulting in further

reputational damage caused to the organisation (Xu & Wu, 2017). PR or communications practitioners must understand the characteristics of crises and know that effective crisis communication forms a central part of protecting the organisation's reputation during a crisis.

Scholars have also researched how engaging in social media activities is positive to corporate reputation (Dijkmans, Kerkhof, & Beukeboom, 2015) and how the use of social media is changing how the public is influencing reputations (Etter et al., 2017). One piece of research emanating from a real crisis regarding vehicle recalls, discussed how the diffusion of information spread so rapidly on social media that it affected the organisation's reputation (Fan, Geddes, & Flory, 2013). Online reputation management requires organisations to understand the different forms of engagement and emotions from stakeholders to ensure that proper platforms for dialogue and interaction are created (Dijkmans et al., 2015).

The corporate reputation level of the organisation is categorised into three levels: low, medium and high (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). Low-reputation organisations are classified as organisations that follow a strategy of one-way communication, where they have no interaction with their stakeholders but simply disseminate information mostly via traditional media (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). Medium-reputation organisations also follow low-reputation organisations' strategies but do engage in dialogue with stakeholders. These organisations manage conflicts offline through other mediums, such as call centres or help-lines. High-reputation organisations are probably the most effective in their crisis communication, as they interact with their stakeholders by providing online information about the crisis on a platform such as Facebook, and endeavour to improve how they are perceived by the public and stakeholders (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). Responding to the public and stakeholders' perceptions and critique minimises rumours and protects the organisation's reputation (Veil et al., 2011).

2.8. Best Practices that Constitute Effective Crisis Communication

The purpose of creating best practices in crisis communication is to ensure that the process of communication is effective and that PR or communications practitioners know how to respond during a crisis (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). The research of other authors has been combined into Table 3, to compare the crisis communication best practices proposed by

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different scholars. The horizontal rows depict the common practices by the different authors. Seeger (2006) and Veil et al. (2011) have very similar best practices in crisis communication, compared to Reynolds and Seeger (2014), as stated in their Environmental Protection Agency's Seven Cardinal Rules of Risk Communication.

Table 3

Summary of best practices for crisis communication

Best practices in Crisis Communication (Seeger, 2006)	Best practices in Risk and Crisis Communication (Veil et al., 2011)	Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (Initial Phase) (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014)	Environmental Protection Agency's Seven Cardinal Rules of Risk Communication (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014)
Process approaches and policy development	Establish risk and crisis management policies and process approaches	Designate crisis spokespersons and identify formal channels and methods of communication	
Pre-event Planning	Plan pre-event logistics		Plan carefully and evaluate performance
Partnerships with the public	Partner with the public		Accept and involve the public as a legitimate partner
Listen to the public's concerns and understand the audience	Listen to the public's concerns and understand the audience	Help the public understand the responsibilities of the various organisations	Listen to the audience
Honesty, candour, and openness	Communicate with honesty, candour and openness		Be honest, frank and open
Collaborate and Coordinate with credible sources	Collaborate and coordinate with credible sources		Coordinate and collaborate with other credible sources
Meet the needs of the media and remain accessible	Meet the needs of the media and remain accessible		Meet the needs of the media
Communicate with compassion, concern, and empathy	Communicate with compassion, concern, and empathy	Convey empathy and reassurance	Speak clearly and with compassion
Accept uncertainty and ambiguity	Accept uncertainty and ambiguity	Reduce crisis-related uncertainty	
Messages of self-efficacy	Provide messages of self-efficacy	Promote self-efficacy	

	Acknowledge and account for cultural differences		
		Establish general understanding of the crisis circumstances	

Source: Reynolds & Seeger (2014); Seeger (2006); Veil et al. (2011)

Reynolds and Seeger (2014) have their Initial Phase as part of their CERC model compared with some of the other authors' best practices. In many instances there are common practices identified by the authors, where Veil et al. (2011) identify culture as an important best practice, for example. Culture has also been identified by various other scholars to be a contributing factor to crisis communication (Grebe, 2013a; Wendling et al., 2013). It is important to note that although culture could play an important role depending on the organisational context in that specific industry, the best practices as summarised in Table 3 could vary from organisation to organisation (Seeger, 2006).

2.9. Conclusion

This chapter has presented a review of what the characteristics of corporate crises are in terms of crisis origin, type and intensity. It further elaborated on the different principles of effective crisis communication, finding that organisations need to take a stance and either follow a defensive strategy or take a more sympathetic approach with an accommodative strategy. The factors of effective and ineffective crisis communication were discussed to understand what scholars are advising based on their expertise and experience with past crises. Ultimately, the principle of any organisation must be to achieve the goals set for the crisis response. The different organisational drivers that enable and prevent effective crisis communication were also discussed. Although not much literature could be found, the interviews with PR and communications practitioners will endeavour to expand on this topic. Different communication mediums to be used in crisis communication were discussed, with organisations and PR practitioners focusing on using interactive social media. This is to ensure that the different forms of engagement with stakeholders are decided on upfront so that the emotions of the public are positively affected, in order not to damage the corporate reputation. Reputation management during crisis communication was identified as being critical for spokespersons to ensure that they are prepared and to convey messages with trust and credibility (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). Lastly, the best practices advocated by various scholars were compared and summarised in Table 3, indicating that known scholars

have identified similar best practices. These will be further evaluated in the research and attempts made to identify whether other practices are utilised by PR practitioners.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the research questions that formed the basis of this study, as derived from the research performed in Chapter Two. These questions were formulated to gain insight into why companies appear to be responding differently in practice, as compared to what the normative literature guidelines recommend. Furthermore, as PR practitioners are involved in advising corporates, the questions will aim to understand how companies should effectively communicate in times of crisis.

3.2. Research Question

How should Companies Effectively Communicate in Times of Crisis?

Chapter Two discussed the views of academics who have performed research regarding effective crisis communication. This academic literature explains how organisations should be communicating during a crisis situation. Yet, organisations are not communicating effectively following a crisis, resulting in the crisis escalating to proportionate measures where the organisation's reputation is damaged. This research intends to understand how companies should effectively communicate in times of crisis.

3.2.1. Research Question 1

What Characteristics of Crises Influence Effective Crisis Communication?

It has been discussed by Coombs (2015) that companies need to decide upfront what strategy they are going to follow during crisis communication. To understand this, the different crisis types in which the respondents were involved will be discussed. Kim (2013) indicates that PR practitioners are not following the correct strategies when a crisis occurs and need to develop them accordingly. The interviews with PR and communications practitioners will investigate why the organisations are taking these approaches.

3.2.2. Research Question 2

What Behaviours Characterise Effective and Ineffective Crisis Communication Management?

Floreddu et al. (2014) indicate that organisations should be following a descriptive normative approach to crisis management. In practice, organisations are still not getting their crisis response messages correct, as damage to reputation has been rated as the number one top risk for companies in the Global Risk Management survey for 2017 (Aon, 2017).

Organisations unintentionally follow different strategies during crises, which, if they are positive strategies, would influence the outcome of the crisis communication process. As seen mostly in media today, organisations are not doing this. Instead, they are following negative strategies for whatever reasons. This causes substantial damage and sometimes leads to double crises taking place, often damaging the organisation's corporate reputation. This question, posed in two parts, will probe the PR and communications practitioner to understand what they regard as effective crisis communication and what they regard as ineffective crisis communication.

3.2.3.   Research Question 3

What is regarded as Enablers and Preventers in Organisational Behaviour for Effective Crisis Communication?

PR practitioners are generally tasked with representing organisations and communicating on their behalf. In some cases, the communications practitioners within an organisation must perform the communication. The problem remains that most organisations have policies and procedures that dictate to these PR practitioners what they can and cannot say. Indirectly, PR practitioners are seen as puppets as they simply relay that information which the organisation wants them to or say what the organisation wants them to. This question will investigate what organisational drivers prevent or enable companies from communicating effectively during a crisis.

3.3.   Conclusion

Following these questions posed to the respondents, the framework of best practices as summarised in Chapter Two will be evaluated to understand if there are new best practices that could be proposed in a framework, following the extensive experience of the PR and communications practitioners who represent organisations in South Africa. Chapter Four

will discuss the methodology used to approach the respondents with the questions as formulated in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

The literature review presented in Chapter Two formed the foundation of the design of the methodology to be used for this research. This chapter outlines the exploratory research methodology used to answer the research questions as posed for discussion in Chapter Three.

The research design (Appendix B), sampling and data-analysis techniques implemented contributed to the qualitative method of data collected. This data was collected using semi-structured, in-depth interviews with PR practitioners who have experience with companies that have experienced crisis incidents in the past. The data was then analysed and categorised and the findings coded into themes as discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two. In the course of this research, the author took cognisance of the fact that researcher bias is present but ensured that the data is reliable and has been validated. At the end of this chapter, the ethical considerations have been discussed. The research limitations will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

4.2. Research Design

Appendix B depicts the thought process followed in designing the research report to integrate the literature with the research questions. During the literature review it was found that a company's response to a crisis depends on the type and characteristics of the crisis (Jin et al., 2014; Kim, 2013; Wendling et al., 2013). Scholars also mention that the crisis response approach taken by a company depends on the strategy that the company embraces (Grebe, 2013a; Jin et al., 2014; Ott & Theunissen, 2015; Xu & Wu, 2017), as well as the form of engagement with which the company decides to respond (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016; Ott & Theunissen, 2015; Xu & Wu, 2017). However, Saunders and Lewis (2012) state that exploratory research is about a subject that is not well understood, and requires new understanding by the researcher. Scholars have identified the need for research into companies experiencing real-world crises to understand if they use institutional frameworks in their selection of strategies used during crisis response to ensure their reputation is properly managed (Austin et al., 2012; Coombs et al., 2010; Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). To this end, the researcher endeavored to understand how companies

should respond in times of crisis and why so many companies do not seem to respond in the manner advocated by the literature.

The study adopted exploratory research with the aim of performing qualitative data analysis into this topic – one that is not clearly understood – and the researcher uses interpretive and theoretical frameworks to form this study (Creswell, 2014). This research has taken a deductive approach to testing the theories and frameworks identified during the literature research (Saunders & Lewis, 2012), with the practical application of companies in their crisis response strategies.

4.3. Population

The population for this study included practitioners from PR companies who have engaged directly with clients who have experienced crises on behalf of their customers. The focus was on public relations companies regarded as experts in their field of public relations in South Africa.

4.4. Units of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was the crisis communication approach taken by the different clients of the PR practitioners. The unit of analysis is the response of a company to a particular crisis. This was based on their approaches taken to ensure effective crisis communication between the company and its stakeholders.

4.5. Sampling Method and Sample Size

Sampling in qualitative research has been defined by Gentles, Charles, Ploeg and McKibbon (2015, p. 1775) as, "the selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives". Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that was used as the availability of expert PR practitioners is limited. Purposive sampling is likely the most regularly portrayed means of sampling in the qualitative methods literature at present. Purposive sampling was utilised to choose a small sample when gathering qualitative data as the author selected experts with experience in public relations to identify the PR companies who formed the basis of this study (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

The names and contact details of the PR practitioners were provided by the identified persons in the personal networks. The identified PR practitioners then referred the researcher to additional PR practitioners. The researcher continued to select and interview PR practitioners until saturation was reached. No names were stored of the identified PR practitioners.

4.6. Interview Process and Schedule

The interview schedule was compiled as shown in Appendix C. The interviews were designed using semi-structured interview questions as outlined by Saunders and Lewis (2012) and guided by an interview schedule. The questions were open-ended as the author required a detailed answer as to what the respondents were thinking and wanted them to voice their opinions of how companies should respond in times of crisis (Wahyuni, 2012). Content validity was ensured by designing the questions from the literature study as performed in chapter 2, to resolve the research question and meet the stated objectives. Construct validity was ensured by formulating the questions similarly for all respondents, such that the answers to the questions would be measurable when translated into data, rather than being insignificant (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

An invitation to participate in the research study was extended to prospective respondents either telephonically or via email (Appendix D). All sessions were confirmed prior to performing the interview, ensuring that the times were still convenient for the respondents and that an interview room/office had been confirmed.

The author generated a research information package for each interview, which consisted of the following:
- Confirmed date and time of the interview;
- Briefing, framing the interview and explaining the purpose of the interview, as well as emphasising confidentiality, anonymity and the voluntary nature of the study;
- Interview Consent Form (Appendix E) for the interview, signed by both parties;
- With permission from the respondent, an audio recording was to follow;
- Research notes taken during the interview;
- Debriefing at the end of the interview to discuss any unclear comments or information (Wahyuni, 2012);

- Transcribing of notes and audio recording immediately after (Saunders & Lewis, 2012); and

- Correspondence thanking the respondent for his/her time allocated.

Each interview was started with a briefing to put the interviewee at ease, followed by the asking of general, easy particulars about the interviewee, so ensuring that a non-threatening approach was taken. The framing of the interview was discussed with each interviewee and the purpose of the research and interview were clearly explained. Again, confidentiality and anonymity were emphasised by signing the consent form with the interviewee. The interview questions were structured such that the wording was clear, and appropriate and unbiased language was used.

4.7. Pilot Test Data Collection

Prior to conducting the formal, semi-structured interviews with PR practitioners, the author held one pilot interview with a PR practitioner to calibrate the effectiveness of the structure and ensure that the wording of the questions was correct (Bell, 2010). This was done to ensure that all the questions would be understood correctly and that they were adequately structured to obtain the relevant data for the study (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). As a result of this pilot interview, the author changed some questions, expressions and interview approaches before the formal interviews were performed (Wahyuni, 2012). Following the first interview performed, the interview schedule was adjusted to ensure proper codes were captured in the next interview. This intense analysis resulted in a dynamic, iterative process as the interviews progressed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

4.8. Data Collection

Following an exploratory research, in-depth, face-to-face and telephonic interviews were conducted with PR company experts to ensure the possibility of probing and adaptability (Bell, 2010). This technique is highly subjective and due to this being the researcher's first experience of interviews, the danger of being biased during the questioning process was real (Bell, 2010). To resolve this, a pilot test was conducted to ensure all the questions could be asked in the same way, so ensuring construct validity as mentioned in section 4.6.

Before the interviews commenced, the respondents were again assured that anonymity would be maintained, as signed in the Consent Forms. Respondent 2 declined to sign the

consent form but did give consent via email, which was printed and submitted as proof. All the other consent forms were signed and sent through as proof of communication and acceptance. The researcher also assured the respondents that anonymity would be honoured.

Each respondent was given the interview schedule beforehand, as they requested the questions for preparation and insight into the research being performed, as well as to mitigate the concerns some had regarding breaching confidentiality in discussing their clients' crises. All the respondents were comfortable to proceed with the interviews and prepared accordingly.

The interviews were conducted telephonically or at the offices of the respondents, all scheduled to take on average one hour. The formal interview process was recorded on an audio recording device, with permission from interviewees, to ensure that the interviewer kept eye contact with respondents while still being able to take notes of all questions covered. Notes were also taken to capture important statements and remarks made to assist with the content analysis to be performed (Bell, 2010). The questions were asked in a sequential approach to obtain the themes and specific statements from respondents, to ensure a qualitative data collection approach (Creswell, 2014).

The intention was to conduct as many interviews as possible to obtain data saturation during the process (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The author performed 14 interviews until data saturation was achieved, as no further new insights into the research question and objectives were provided. The shortest interview was 27 minutes and 26 seconds long, while the longest interview was 59 minutes and 22 seconds long, with an average interview length of 46 minutes and 34 seconds, within the contracted time of one hour. In all cases the interviewer ended the interview process to ensure there was no chance of the interview exceeding the time limit and to ensure compliance with the ethical promise made to the interviewee of the time limit (Bell, 2010). The interviewees were all thanked for their time and effort taken to participate in the research interview.

To ensure proper reliability and validity, the respondents were researched using their websites and social media pages to ensure that any background information was obtained to enable the researcher to validate that all respondents fit the study.

4.9. Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the interviews. The recordings were transcribed using three different transcribers as they were available, each having signed a non-disclosure agreement. The first transcription from every transcriber was proof read by the researcher to ensure the script was transcribed as spoken by the respondent. Corrections were made where the recording was not clear enough or the phrase was left open if it could not be resolved and the section of phrase was excluded from coding. The transcribed interview was then thoroughly read to immerse the researcher into the rich content of the interview to become familiar with the data and identify the relevant themes. Each transcript was uploaded individually into ATLAS.ti® to enable the analysis of the qualitative data and was coded accordingly. Codes were allocated against emerging themes from the interviews. The researcher ended up with a first iteration of 600 codes, which were grouped into different categories. Based on the content from the interviewees' responses, common themes and patterns were identified through the words and phrases used. As stated by Bell (2010), the researcher attempted not to be biased in framing the responses into themes or categories upfront. As the data was analysed, codes were identified, deduced from the literature review performed. Categories were also identified as new codes emerged from the interview process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Once the categories were created, it was evident that duplication was present. The codes were linked and common codes were deleted to reduce the final code count to 352 final codes, which were grouped into categories and paired into different themes in Code Manager in ATLAS.ti®. As shown in Table 4, the quotations were linked to the codes and the grounded count was visible between the different codes.

Table 4

Example of codes extracted from ATLAS.ti®

	Name	Grounded		Density		Author	Created
●	Effective: Accessible to media	▬	7		1	JONKERJ3	9/9/2018 11:53 A...
●	Effective: Actively responding	▬▬	16		3	JONKERJ3	9/8/2018 1:06 PM
●	Effective: Admitting you were wrong	▪	4		2	JONKERJ3	9/9/2018 9:13 AM
●	Effective: Agile	▬	7		1	JONKERJ3	9/9/2018 10:03 A...
●	Effective: Apologize immediately	▪	4		2	JONKERJ3	9/8/2018 1:16 PM
○	Effective: Avoid logical responses		1		1	JONKERJ3	9/30/2018 1:09 PM
●	Effective: Avoid statements	▪	5		1	JONKERJ3	8/23/2018 9:04 PM
●	Effective: Be ready, ahead of News Cycle	▪	3		1	JONKERJ3	9/25/2018 7:35 PM
●	Effective: Being Honest	▬	7		1	JONKERJ3	9/9/2018 9:12 AM
●	Effective: Being in touch with incident	▪	3		1	JONKERJ3	9/9/2018 9:48 AM
●	Effective: Being open & transparent	▬▬	18		1	JONKERJ3	9/9/2018 9:12 AM
●	Effective: Cascade the message effectively	▪	2		1	JONKERJ3	9/22/2018 2:14 PM
●	Effective: CEO is available	▬	14		1	JONKERJ3	9/3/2018 9:46 PM
●	Effective: Confidence	▪	2		1	JONKERJ3	9/4/2018 8:55 PM
●	Effective: Confidentiality		1		1	JONKERJ3	9/4/2018 8:20 PM
●	Effective: Consistent	▬	10		1	JONKERJ3	9/22/2018 10:18...
●	Effective: Controlling the crisis & narrative	▬	15		2	JONKERJ3	9/8/2018 1:11 PM
●	Effective: Direct communications with media	▪	8		2	JONKERJ3	8/30/2018 9:27 PM
○	Effective: Disclosing reasons why	▪	2		1	JONKERJ3	9/30/2018 1:19 PM
●	Effective: Do what it takes	▪	2		2	JONKERJ3	9/9/2018 9:49 AM
●	Effective: Don't undermine trust	▪	2		1	JONKERJ3	9/9/2018 9:11 AM
○	Effective: Explain Corrective Measures	▬	8		1	JONKERJ3	9/24/2018 8:25 PM
●	Effective: Fact Verification	▬▬	24		1	JONKERJ3	8/22/2018 9:39 PM

This started revealing an indication of the themes emerging from the interviews. These themes were linked into the seven different code categories. Although this way of coding was elaborate, the common codes were not paired completely, to not lose richness in the different concepts discussed.

The category construction process then started by developing the major and common codes into categories, to enable the coding of the data for interpretation and running analytics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As stated by Bell (2010, p. 222), "Coding allows you to 'cluster' key issues in your data and allows you to take steps towards 'drawing conclusions'." To support the researcher in this process, Excel was used, as well as uploading the transcription into ATLAS.ti® for coding (Appendix F). This deductive approach that was used to code the data enabled the categories to be grouped into the different themes relating to the research questions. Once all the interviews were transcribed and analysed into coding, the data was available for interpretation. Once all the coding had been completed, the

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different code reports were drawn to be used as templates for writing up the report findings. An example of the Effective Crisis Communication Code Group Report is attached as Appendix G.

4.10. Data Validity and Reliability

Reliability and validity were confirmed by critically assessing the procedure of data collection used (Bell, 2010). To this end, reliability was ensured with a qualitative interview schedule with questions that were designed to deliver consistent findings under different occasions (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The researcher recognised his own bias in the interview process, as well as the bias from the respondents. The interview schedule was sent to all respondents beforehand and the respondents were given time during the interview to read and understand the questions properly.

Validity refers to the extent to which the findings are about what they appear to be (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). In this qualitative study, validity was considered to also mean producing credible conclusions as claimed by Bell (2010). Validity was ensured through the use of the interview schedule, to ensure a common understanding was achieved throughout the interview process.

A further precaution was taken to ensure proper reliability and validity by researching the PR companies' websites and social media pages. This was performed to ensure that any background information was obtained to enable the researcher to validate that all the PR companies fitted the study.

4.11. Ethical Considerations

To ensure the research was conducted in an ethical manner, the researcher first obtained ethical clearance from the GIBS MBA Research Ethical Clearance Committee. The Ethical Clearance is attached as Appendix H. To confirm confidentiality, the respondents were requested to give informed consent before the interview process was performed. This was completed prior to starting the interviews with the respondents. The names of respondents were not requested or recorded and anonymity was confirmed. The confidentiality of their clients was protected and the names of the companies or specific crisis events were not requested.

4.12. Conclusion

This chapter described the research design, sampling and data analysis techniques implemented which contributed to the qualitative method of data collected. This data was collected using semi-structured, in-depth interviews with PR practitioners who have experience with companies that have experienced crisis incidents in the past. To meet the objectives established in the beginning of this research, the data was analysed and categorised and the findings were coded into themes as discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two. In the course of this research, the author took cognisance of the fact that researcher bias was present but ensured that the data was reliable and had been validated. At the end of this chapter the ethical considerations were discussed. The findings of this exploratory study are described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the data of the study, which were analysed from the in-depth interviews with the 14 respondents. Following the coding of the data, the theme reports were drawn from ATLAS.ti® and rewritten into findings for this study. The section below discusses the findings from the participants and gives context to the feedback received.

5.2. Description of Participants and Context

The respondents varied from PR practitioners and communication practitioners, to media reporters. Several of the respondents had also worked as reporters before and had very good exposure to crisis communication. Of the 14 respondents interviewed, 11 were PR practitioners and three were media reporters. All of the respondents were experienced in crisis communication and added rich information to the context of the subject. Although the respondents commented on their clients or previous organisations with which they had worked, all gave the impression that before their working relationship with the organisation, the organisations had dealt ineffectively with crisis communication. The summary of the respondents and the organisations they discussed is summarised in Appendix J. The respondents are categorised in the table in terms of their professions, being PR practitioners or media reporters. A total of 26 company crises were discussed between the different respondents. The companies were allocated a description based on which sector they fell in, and each crisis was identified with a descriptor – the closest describing the incident.

On completion of the coding as described in section 4.9, the summary of all the respondents was extracted from ATLAS.ti® indicating the number of quotations allocated to each respondent, as indicated in Table 5. From this table it can be seen that Respondents 1, 3, 4 and 7 gave very rich feedback in terms of the quotations provided. In total there were 1,463 quotations provided by the 14 respondents. Although Respondent 1 was the pilot interviewee and the shortest interview duration of all the respondents, she gave so much information that it initiated 23% of the 352 final codes, as indicated.

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Table 5

Summary of respondent quotations

Id	Name	Quotations	
D 1	Respondent 1_Pilot		196
D 2	Respondent 2_20180827		99
D 3	Respondent 3_20180828		177
D 4	Respondent 4_20180905 FH		195
D 5	Respondent 5_20180920 DC		107
D 7	Respondent 6_20180921 NN		124
D 8	Respondent 7_20180921 AD		171
D 9	Respondent 8_20180926 PM		72
D 10	Respondent 9_20180926 RM &...		83
D 11	Respondent 10_20180928 SM		83
D 12	Respondent 11_20181004 MK		32
D 13	Respondent 12_20181005 VC		29
D 14	Respondent 13_20181008 PR		56
D 15	Respondent 14_20181009 AF		39

For this reason, the coding received from the pilot interview was included in the data. Respondent 3 initiated 27% of the codes. Respondents 11 and 12, however, performed very poorly in the interviews. Their knowledge was limited and they appeared to have insufficient experience on the subject, even though they held senior positions in the communications field. The interview discussions were very one-sided and the respondents had to be probed to obtain information. It is possible that this was due to the fact that those interviews were arranged on short notice and the respondents did not have much time to prepare. Where relevant, their quotations were used in the analysis. Saturation was reached after nine interviews (Figure 2). Respondents 10 and 11 also contributed to the 600 codes. After the iteration process of merging codes together into the categories, these codes fell away, leaving Respondent 9 with the last six codes of the 352 final codes. The researcher continued to arrange three more interviews to ensure that data saturation had been reached.
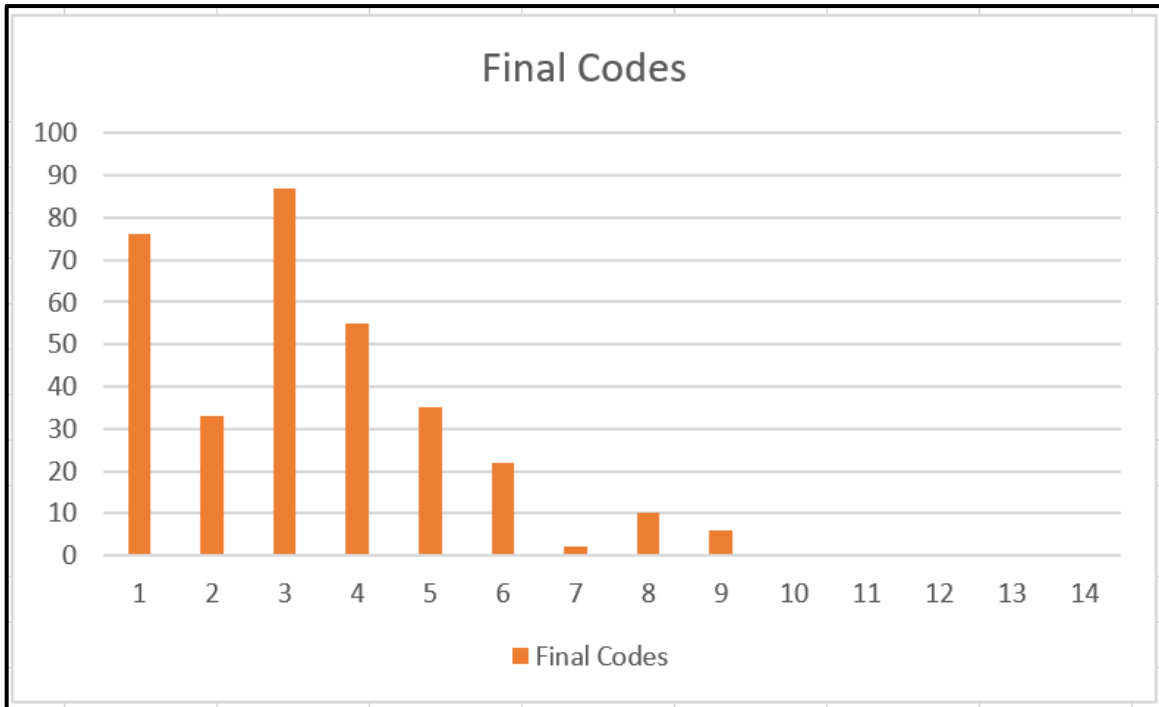
Figure 2. **Total number of codes provided**

5.3. Results: Question 1

Characteristics of Crises that Influence Effective Crisis Communication*?*

In the initial discussions with the respondents, the respondents spoke about different crisis situations. These crises were categorised into different crisis descriptor types, as shown in Appendix J. The crises were then allocated into crisis types, to distinguish between the various crises. The responses from each crisis type were discussed with the respondents to establish how the organisations or spokespersons acted following the crisis.

5.3.1. Crisis Types

The crisis types were categorised to understand if certain situations led to specific responses. During the discussions the respondents said that most crisis situations were either divided into issues or significant crises. The respondents stressed that if the issues were resolved, most crises could be prevented. Most of the crises discussed were significant crises, which resulted in the CEOs being the spokespersons. Respondents mentioned that most crises resulted from within the organisation as issues. Although the

discussions around the different types of crises were interesting, it was not the objective to understand what type of crisis resulted in the way of communication. This could, however, be a topic for further research; to understand if there is a correlation between the crisis descriptor and the response taken by the organisation.

5.3.2. Crisis Responses

All the crises were discussed to understand the strategies that the organisations followed and the initial responses they embraced. Most respondents mentioned that although the spokesperson or CEO did not necessarily respond correctly at the onset of the crisis, once they assisted the CEOs, the response changed.

The company responses were summarised from all the respondents into a table, as shown in Appendix K. From the findings with the PR practitioners, the results indicated in Figure 3 show that few organisations had open and quick responses. The findings showed that the amount of negative responses taken by spokespersons coincided with the negative strategies. Very few spokespersons had quick responses. Respondents mentioned that being open was an important response, although being honest and transparent featured very low, which was not expected from the organisations.
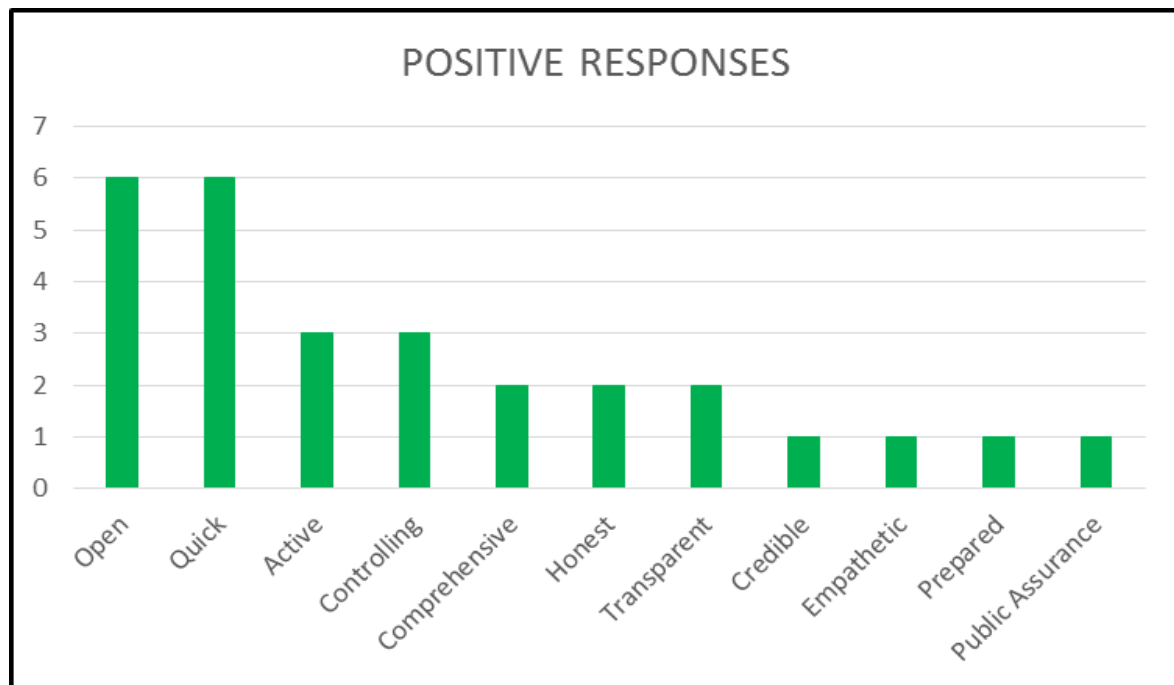
Figure 3. Company feedback: positive responses

As indicated in Figure 4, findings from the respondents showed that organisations are not open and transparent and responded very slowly, and were also closed and unprepared in their narratives. The negative responses coincide with the negative strategies, where most respondents followed these behaviours. Depending on the communication strategy followed by the spokesperson and the form of response taken for the specific crisis type, this could lead to emotional responses by the affected stakeholders. Respondents mentioned that emotions such as anger could aggravate the crisis when spokespersons responded negatively.
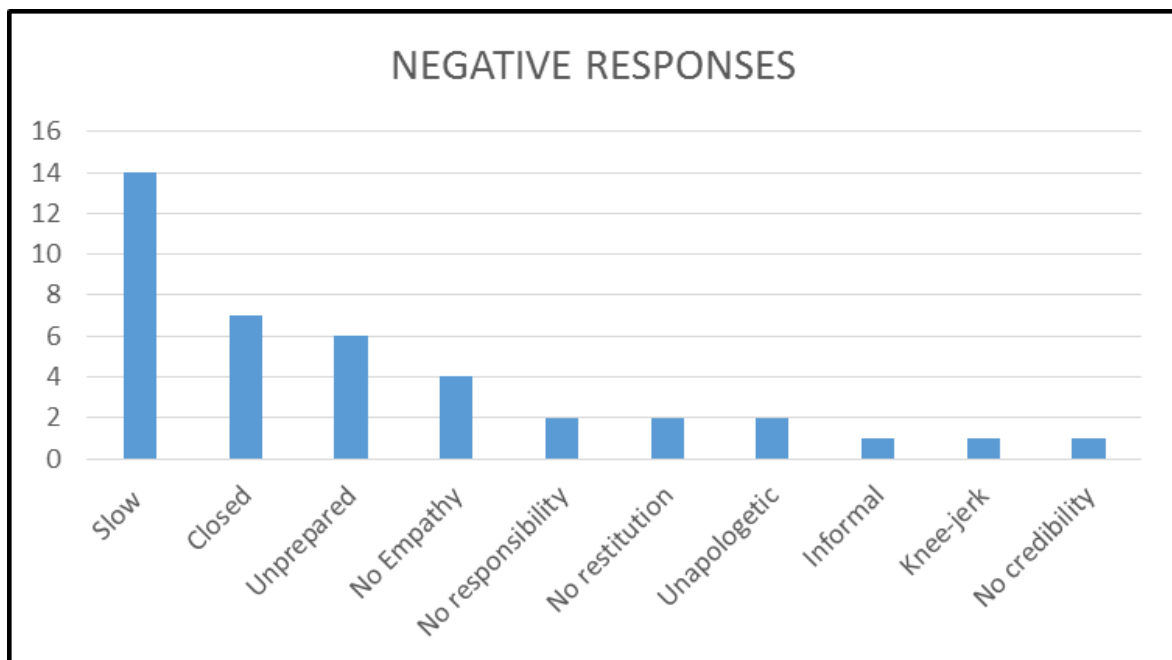
Figure 4. **Company feedback: negative responses**

5.3.3. Summary

In summary, the crisis types were categorised to understand if certain situations led to specific responses. Respondents mentioned that most crisis situations were either divided into issues or into significant crises. The respondents stressed that if the issues were resolved, most crises could be prevented. The findings further indicated that organisations and spokespersons are not following the positive responses as advised by academics. Due to the negative strategies followed by spokespersons, they are slow and unprepared in their responses, closed in their approach and do not embrace an empathetic approach to their victims and stakeholders.

5.4. Results: Research Question 2a

What Behaviours Characterise Effective Crisis Communication Management?

Various themes arose out of the discussions and were built upon. It was clear that all respondents were confident that with most of the crises in which they were involved, the organisations did not respond effectively following their crisis. The initial findings from this study emphasised that respondents had to ensure rapid response and good media communications were crucial for organisations to initiate their responses to the stakeholders. It was then essential that organisations were honest, demonstrated regret following the crisis and used rapport in their responses to the victims and affected parties. The process to start instilling resolution by the organisation would only be taken seriously by the stakeholders if the organisation took responsibility for the crisis that occurred. The process of restitution was then initiated by the organisation, avoiding rationalism and just being mindful in its communication. The final theme that arose in effective crisis communication was for the organisation to disclose the reasons why the crisis occurred and demonstrate to stakeholders that it is doing what it can to restore the situation.

The discussion with Respondent 9 revealed that he uses eight Rs and one D as a guideline for effective crisis communication, which includes Rapid Response, Rapport, Regret, Resolution, Responsibility, Restitution, avoiding Rationalism and Disclosure. As the researcher grouped the codes into themes, these similar topics were used as mentioned by Respondent 9.

Respondent 6 conveyed the ten lessons learnt (Appendix L) from a recent crisis situation with a banking client. These ten lessons were implemented during a crisis situation as effective crisis communication learnings. Cognisance was taken of these learnings during the analysis of the findings.

The discussion below analyses the dialogues that took place with the various respondents in what they found to be the most important aspects of effective crisis communication. All the respondents mentioned that a correct strategy was to be followed, which resulted in effective crisis communication.

5.4.1. Strategies Followed During Crises

Companies either followed positive or negative strategies from the onset of the crisis. Figure 5 shows the results of the positive strategies. This finding shows that assuming responsibility and acknowledgement were the strategies most frequently followed. Being proactive and taking control also featured as positive strategies by seven organisations. Findings showed that only one PR practitioner mentioned that an organisation was accommodative in their approach. This shows that not enough spokespersons are taking on accommodative strategies.
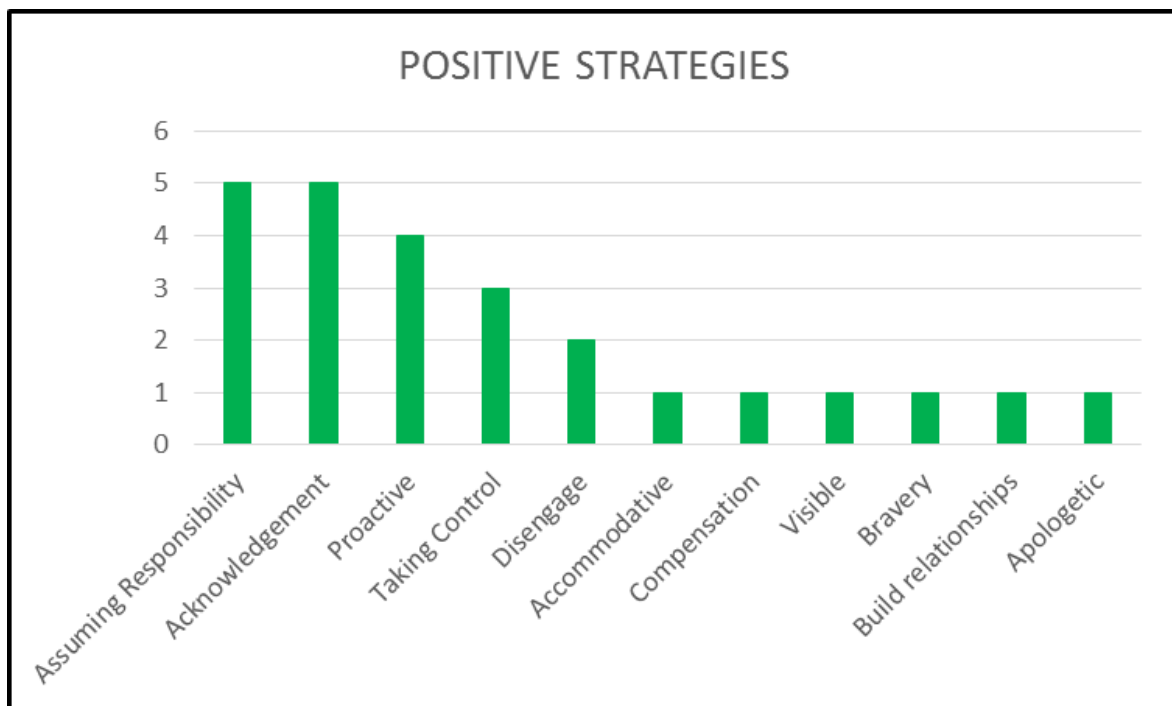
Figure 5. Company feedback: positive strategies

In today's world it is expected of organisations that they follow more positive strategies, compared to the negative strategies in Figure 6. The results found that absence featured as the highest negative strategy by most organisations, resulting in the crisis situations that escalated to the point where PR practitioners got involved. The findings also showed that following legalistic and defensive strategies featured high, which is the traditional strategy followed by organisations and stated in the literature. Denial was only mentioned by one PR practitioner as an approach taken by an organisation, which shows that this strategy is uncommon.

The findings also revealed that no recommendations for sympathetic approaches were found, with one PR respondent mentioning that an organisation was unsympathetic. It was expected that organisations would show sympathy in their responses, but organisations are failing to realise that they need to adopt a sympathetic approach to their strategy.
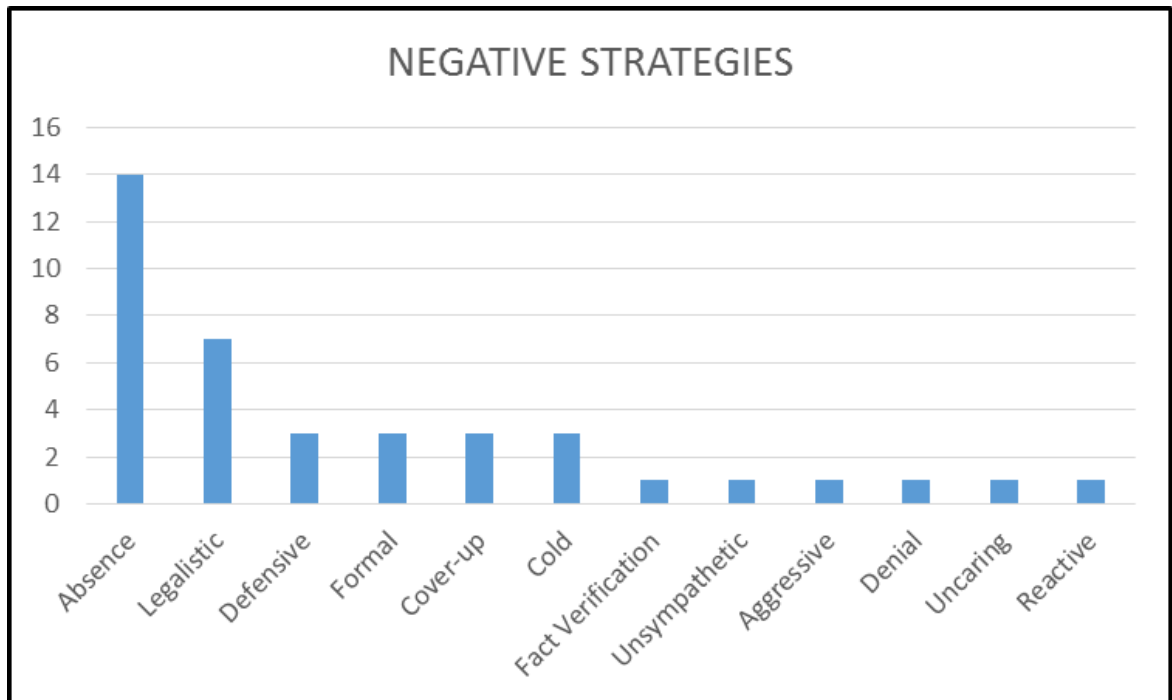
Figure 6. **Company feedback: negative strategies**

When a crisis has occurred, the strategy that the organisation takes during the initial correspondence sets the scene for the remaining crisis messages until the crisis has been resolved. From Figure 6 it was evident, and from the examples of crises the respondents discussed, that most of the strategies were negative. In the discussions with the respondents the positive strategies were highlighted and coded into themes in an attempt to understand which positive strategies respondents believe would have the most effective outcome during crisis communication.

Although mostly negative strategies were portrayed by the organisations or the CEOs, it is crucial that the focus is on the positive strategies to be taken. In most instances where negative strategies were followed, this led to the crisis situations spiralling out of control.

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Several respondents mentioned that it was essential not to be absent, as most organisations have done, but rather to be proactive and take control of the crisis situation.

Most respondents in their discussions mentioned that the organisations or CEOs were *absent* in their crisis communications partly due to the inexperience of not knowing what to do, and partly due to fear of the media and of being held liable for the crisis. In most cases where the CEOs or spokespersons were absent in communicating, this led to the situation escalating in the media or on social media. This is mostly because a vacuum is left; one which needs to be filled with crisis information regarding what has happened and what is being done to control the crisis situation and to compensate victims. If a vacuum is left on social media, the public or other stakeholders will fill the gaps with their opinions. Therefore it is essential for an organisation to ensure that their strategy is to actively respond and assume responsibility at the outset of the crisis.

From this perspective the positive strategies will be discussed further as they can influence how effective crisis communication progresses following a crisis.

Assuming responsibility from the outset of the crisis communication was emphasised by most respondents. Respondent 1, who comes from a large corporate, said their response was always to admit there was an incident. She stated that admitting there was an incident does not acknowledge that you are liable for it, but that it was very important to admit the incident had occurred.

> Respondent 1: *"…we admit that there is an incident."*

> Respondent 10: *"When people are dying, they do not want to hear you are investigating, they want to hear you know what, that you are taking responsibility, you going to do something about it."*

Other respondents echoed these statements, *acknowledging* their mistakes upfront and starting the restoration process. From the interviews, the respondents were adamant that it was best to admit responsibility upfront. This was seen as more forgiving by the public and reduced their anger towards the organisation. Respondent 4 did, however, also say that you could only take responsibility once you knew what had happened.

Respondent 3: *"If you are proven to be at fault, you have to hold up your hand and say you are sorry."*

Respondent 4: *"…if they say, 'look we cannot take responsibility because we do not know yet, but in fact it looks pretty likely and, in fact we are going to, regardless, compensate these families and give a huge pay-out', somehow that alleviates people."*

Respondent 4: *"If you are to blame, that to me is a firm tendency; if you are to blame, you should take responsibility and apologise immediately and there are legal implications to that."*

In most crisis communication discussions, the trust relationship was not only seen as an enabler to effective crisis communication. **Building relationships with trust** with all the stakeholders was a strategy used by various organisations. Once a crisis has occurred, the organisation cannot then start building that trust relationship. This is a key strategy; one which the organisation has to do constantly throughout its business cycle.

Respondent 7: *"…bond of trust is not built up during the crisis. You build that up way before you have a crisis. You have got to have some sort of a relationship with the media long before the crisis happens."*

Respondent 7: *"If you have got a good relationship with them, you can say, look there is a really serious issue at the moment..."*

This showed that it is essential for an organisation to have good trust relationships with journalists. Journalists need to perform their jobs as well and get stories out on deadline, but if they know they can trust the spokesperson, they will withhold going to the press until they receive the proper media release with facts. Respondents did stress that the deadlines of journalists had to be honoured. It was a two-way trust relationship.

Once the acknowledgement is made, organisations should be ***accommodative*** and consider ***compensating*** the victims or their families. This is not a "cover-up" compensation to make the crisis go away but rather, a strategy to show the victims or their families that

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the organisation is sorry and cares about them. This is initial compensation, even if the cause has not yet been proven. Respondent 4 was in two minds on this matter, saying that you could not compensate victims, as money does not repay the loss of life if the crisis was that severe, but to start doing something showed regret from the company.

> Respondent 2: *"This was a terrible disaster, we are deeply sorry, we are going to compensate the victims, and we take full responsibility for this."*

> Respondent 4: *"Do you have to apologise or can you do something as extreme which is compensating victims…*regardless, compensate these families and give a huge pay-out."

Three of the respondents mentioned that the strategy to follow upfront was to **apologise immediately**. It did not matter if the apology was not required, it showed the victims, their families and the public that the company cares about the victims and that they are truly sorry. Respondent 4 noted that in her experience as a journalist, it was important to be brave and apologise. Respondent 8, however, was of the opinion that even if you responded many times, it was out in the media and would count for sympathy when the restoration process started.

> Respondent 4: *"…start in brave and start apologising as soon as you can and put away legal issues."*

> Respondent 8: *"And of course you can only apologise once too much, then it is out there."*

Respondents were adamant that although it was important to take responsibility and acknowledge the crisis, the company had to attempt to **disengage** the media conversation as quickly as possible and not fuel the messages on social media – especially if there were individual attacks on the organisation, named by Respondent 5 as a "troll".

> Respondent 5: *"…he was effectively becoming a social media troll, and the way you handle a troll is to disengage."*

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Respondent 14: *"…so if that person is not getting any traction, leave it and depending on that relationship with that person or relationships with other people, avoid that person."*

When spokespersons are expected to respond, it is essential for them to **take control** of the crisis communication. Where a company was reactive in the communications, the crisis situation became worse when engaging with the stakeholders. Where the organisation was forthright and seen to be leading the communications, the organisation was in control of the situation, which mostly led to positive outcomes.

Respondent 7: *"… they wanted to be proactive as far as they possibly could. So there was no waiting for people to ask questions. It was getting out there and telling the media and their shareholders and their employees and everybody who was a stakeholder in the company about what the issues were."*

Respondent 7: *"… they are managing the narrative. And that is exactly what happens. The whole thing in a crisis is to be able to manage the story and to be seen as in control."*

5.4.2. Rapid Response Following a Crisis

In all categories a summary will be added to portray the importance conveyed from respondents regarding that category. In the case of **quick response**, all 14 respondents affirmed the category, with a total of 36 quotations stating that the response following a crisis must be quick. Once the crisis occurs or is made known, there is very little time for the organisation or spokesperson to respond. The discussions below will emphasise the importance of quick response as it impacts on the organisation's reputation.

Respondent 3: "…*you really do have to get stuff done fast."*

Respondent 7: *"…when a crisis hits there is no time to think or anything, you have just got to act."*

Respondent 11: *"We need to respond as quick as possible, and in as many words as possible."*

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It did emerge during the interviews that the respondents had different opinions of what quick was, ranging from instantaneous to within the first few weeks.

> Respondent 4: *"…you should respond very quickly…"* and stated again *"…you need to respond instantaneously."*

> Respondent 7: *"…there are other times when you need to jump in right from the beginning."*

These respondents understood that the organisation first had to gather information before a response could be made but essentially, **quick approvals** were required. Depending on the crisis at stake, however, and the approval processes required, spokespersons could get approval for a response, sometimes in days. This indicates that some spokespersons or organisations could get responses out very quickly, depending on the severity of the crisis and if the facts known at that stage could be communicated. Based on the context of the crisis, most respondents were adamant that quick response should be – in today's time of social media – within the first hour. Respondents mentioned that if you do not respond quickly enough, this creates a vacuum on social media, which will be filled with public responses. This results in leaving the victims and public to desperately start forming their own perceptions and opinions. The public on social media will then start to respond based on hearsay and assumptions, resulting in a larger crisis developing.

> Respondent 4: "…*if you do not speak, you create a sort of vacuum*."

> Respondent 9: "*You can have a response, but it takes days to get something approved*."

> Respondent 10: "…*they should have been the one to go to the market first in terms of communication."*

Eight of the respondents were quite clear that after the initial response, the process must continue. It was essential that the rapid response way of communication was continued by ensuring that the spokesperson or organisation kept on **actively responding** with the stakeholders. Respondents said that different forms of media could be used to ensure active

response takes place. This emphasises the fact that there needs to be active response taking place from the organisation following their crisis; the public and stakeholders need to know what the organisation is doing in response to the situation. Even if the crisis or situation is hostile, it is critical for an organisation to actively respond.

> Respondent 4: "…*it is not before you are actively responding and if you do not speak, you create a sort of vacuum.*"

> Respondent 7: "*You cannot just communicate on the first day, and then leave this vacuum…you have got to get back to them...*"

> Respondent 10: "*You are actually going out there and you speak, you put yourself in front of the cameras, you go and you speak to every single journalist...*"

Only after the fourth interview did the topic emerge that the spokesperson needs to be **agile** in their response and not bound by crisis communication templates or hymn sheets. The discussion was around how prepared an organisation could be in times of crises to respond effectively. Respondents mentioned that although it was important to have templates, companies still had to be agile in their response. Crisis communication templates are fixed and the respondents emphasised that you cannot plan for all types of crises. Thus, the spokesperson needs to be agile in changing the way they respond during the crisis.

> Respondent 4: "…*you have got to plan to be agile in your response…" and you need to "…make sure that you are very agile*."

> Respondent 14: *"The only thing I would advise, when a crises does arrive, you cannot respond like a robot. You have to make an assessment of the specific circumstances that your communication is on point."*

From the interviews it was evident from most respondents that the organisation or the PR practitioner must have a relationship with the media of **being accessible**. This was to ensure that effective crisis communication could take place. Respondents stated that to be very accessible to the media was an important factor in effective crisis communication. This ensures that a two-way trust relationship is built so that the media reporters are able to

phone the organisation when required, even if it means having the CEO on speed dial to make sure everyone is accessible when critical discussions need to take place.

> Respondent 4: "…*you are very accessible and they can phone you as the CEO and get info...*"

> Respondent 14: *"What is important is to communicate, pre-emptily even in non-crisis situations, so that if and when a crisis occurs, there is greater understanding of the social and technical issues at work and in addition, obviously engaging with media and others in other towns that works for better relationships when a crisis actually happens."*

In the view of the respondents, the way that most organisations managed their crises was inadequate. Respondents 4, 7 and 8 were all of the opinion that organisations need to learn not only from their own past experiences, but also **learn from other experiences** of other organisations. Organisations should not wait to find out how to respond effectively but rather, follow scenarios from other organisations and learn from their mistakes.

> Respondent 4: "…*the best planning is learning how important this is…*"

> Respondent 8: "…*I think we are lucky if we have not experienced it but other people have.*"

5.4.3. Credibility

Six respondents emphasised that you need to **verify your facts** before you communicate with the media. Respondent 1 mentioned many times in different ways that you need to verify your facts before you perform any communication. It was mentioned in the Quick Response section that the response is hampered by facts needing to be verified before communication can go out to the media. There is a process, as mentioned by respondents, to ensure that the proper facts are gained from crisis managers or other subject matter experts from the organisation. It is essential to ensure credibility is established for the press release. Respondents also mentioned the need to be proactive in the engagement strategy so that the organisation is in full control of the crisis communication situation. It is furthermore important that once all the facts have been verified, all the spokespersons –

ideally not more than one – send the same message to the press. If the organisation has a good trust relationship with the media and delays are incurred due to lack of factual information, the media will wait until the facts are known but will then expect a proper press release to be submitted.

> Respondent 5: *"…look at a proactive and reactive engagement strategy on both the media and stakeholders on where you are going to engage on each of one of those issues and then we build content behind that what you will engage with so that everybody sings on the same song sheets."*

> Respondent 7: "*…in a good communication team, you will always have that background information that you can give while you are waiting for what actually happened, what went wrong."*

> Respondent 12: *"When you actually speak, correctly represent the facts. You cannot avoid the facts."*

Following on this theme of good media communications, six respondents regarded it important to have a **proactive engagement strategy** after the crisis had occurred. Respondents iterated that if issues are not dealt with timeously, they will evolve in crises. They explained that in an organisation, issues will develop long before a crisis explodes in the public. Thus, it is essential for organisations to take a proactive strategy and manage these issues long before they become crises. They also stated that if you deal with issues upfront, your organisation is far more proactive than other organisations and gives the organisation greater credibility and builds its reputation. This concept of detecting possible crises is included in the company's risk register, which will be discussed later during the organisational drivers which enable effective crisis communication.

> Respondent 5: "*Issues can become crises if you leave them unchecked.*"

> Respondent 7: "*…as this thing gained momentum, we were proactive…"* and "*…being proactive and being the first one to come out with the news.*"

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Respondent 8: "…*pro-activeness, to be able to detect something that is likely to cause a crisis.*"

As mentioned above, to ensure the spokesperson has a proactive engagement strategy, the respondents stated it is important to **control the narrative** from the initial response of the crisis. This will ensure that the organisation is proactive in its response. Ten respondents emphasised that you need to lead your narrative and be in control. Respondents mentioned that if you are not proactive and confident in responding, then it would seem to the public that you are coming in afterwards in an attempt to perform damage control.

Respondent 6: "…*you need to take control of the basics, but you have to be confident in the communications, you have to be bold.*"

Respondent 10: "*Because you are responsible, you do not want to be responding, you want to be leading the narrative.*"

5.4.4.   Good Media Communications

Many respondents mentioned that **social media** is very much a part of crisis communication today, with respondents mentioning that the public will get onto social media and respond. In previous years when an organisation had a crisis, they would prepare their press release and respond to the mass media houses for communication the following day. Today, social media should be used by spokespersons or organisations to be open and transparent, giving information as it is required. Respondents said it seems as if organisations are scared of social media and have not realised that social media could be used to their advantage. If voice notes are posted on social media, they used these voice notes to monitor what was being said in public and gauge the atmosphere within the affected parties following their crisis. Respondents also said that social media should be used effectively, which is part of having a proactive engagement strategy – to use social media to your advantage during crisis communication.

Respondent 1: "…*the general public can get things onto social media.*"

Respondent 6: "…*suddenly there was a bunch of voice notes that appeared all over, which everyone sent to us.*"

Respondent 13: *"…we take our social media very seriously. We have had far too many things were issues go viral. We have an external agency that monitors our social media accounts daily, hourly."*

Respondent 7 mentioned that social media should be used for communicating with the organisation's **own employees** while they are experiencing a crisis situation. This medium is very effective in communicating first hand with employees, as this respondent mentioned that the unions were already using social media to communicate with their members. Employees are also stakeholders during a crisis and social media should be used very effectively, even within organisations. Employees are already on social media responding to friends and families during a crisis.

Respondent 7: "*They could call a strike in three hours, because of that communications, not really social media but it is aligned to social media."*

Respondent 10: "…*if you want to be first to the market, you have to use the one platform that allows you that privilege, and it is social media."*

This theme had mixed views. Some respondents emphasised that not-withstanding the severity of the crisis, the **CEO must be available** very quickly and be part of the crisis communication process. Some respondents were adamant that the CEO must be the spokesperson as he is face and voice of the organisation and in a crisis. In some instances the respondents mentioned that the CEO will only respond on high severity incidents. Their argument was that the CEO does not have the time for all the crisis situations.

Respondent 3: "*The CEO is normally the spokesperson, or the CFO would be the spokesperson."*

Respondent 5: "*He is the face and voice of the organisation and in a crisis, he needs to be present."*

Respondent 10: "*When a crises hits, the CEO needs to part of that crisis communications..."*

Most respondents had good experiences regarding how well some organisations are managing communication plans but emphasised that spokespersons and **organisations need to know what to communicate.** Communication plans will be discussed under organisational drivers that enable crisis communication. It was noted by several respondents that even if you had very good communication plans, if you did not know what to communicate, you would not be able to communicate very well during a crisis.

> Respondent 1: "…*the people sending the information need to know exactly what they are allowed to say.*"

> Respondent 7: "*How you communicate at the time is also very important. The tone that you use, the words that you use.*"

From the interviews it was evident that respondents believe that when the crisis response started, it was important that if there was more than one spokesperson, **the message was consistent** so that the same information was broadcast internally within the company and externally to media. Again the respondents emphasised that as far as possible, only one spokesperson should be used throughout the crisis to ensure consistency in what is said.

> Respondent 6: "…*you need to be consistent…*"

> Respondent 7: "…*the message was all controlled at one point that it was the same message.*"

During crisis communication it is important to **give assurance** to your victims, public and stakeholders that you are in control of the crisis. Respondent 2 explained, however, that following an incident where a plane crashed, journalists and relatives were flown out to the site where the accident occurred to have a memorial service for the victims' families and to ensure that all the media journalists and stakeholders knew that the company cared about what happened. An organisation needs to respond to the victims and public to show empathy following a crisis. This will give the public assurance that the organisation is sorry and is doing everything in its power to restore the situation.

> Respondent 1: "…*do not be too worried because it is under control.*"

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Respondent 2: "…*were brought out for a memorial service on the beach.*"

Respondent 13: *"For me it is showing empathy, showing that you are doing the best you can in line with the company's values."*

Before responses are conveyed to the media it is important for the spokesperson or organisation to ensure that the media message is transcribed into **media friendly narrative**. The language needs to be simple and understandable. However, Respondent 7 mentioned that messages must not be too short, otherwise they sound unsympathetic.

Respondent 1: "…*you get the information. You then need to transcribe it into a media language."*

Respondent 10: "*Simplicity and the language that you use. I get the communication to the lowest common denominator."*

5.4.5. Honesty

Nine respondents emphasised repeatedly that being **open and transparent** is the key to effective communication and ensures that confidence is gained with the public. Most respondents iterated that spokespersons need "to be open and transparent". Examples were quoted that once the organisation openly communicated, the situation changed on social media. Respondent 6 mentioned that the organisation was open in the crisis communication which caused the situation to change. She also mentioned that following the crisis they held a press conference to give the opportunity for further questions and answers. Respondents also said it was important to cultivate relationships and to ensure that confidence was built with the media upfront, not during the crisis. As openness and transparency was highlighted, the respondents iterated that **honesty** was equally as important. Respondent 4, a journalist, repeatedly stated that honesty was very important in what was said by a spokesperson.

Respondent 6: "…*we calmed the market down. We had the press conference and we were very open and frank. We said that we had not had the time to show you the report, we have these top five allegations and let us diffuse them one by one."*

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Respondent 13: *"We keep very open and an ongoing dialogue with our media. I'm pretty sure, in time of crises, they need to do their job, whether you like it or not, they need to respond."*

Respondent 14: *"I think what was effective the way that we did it, we would always make it clear what we did and did not know, and in that way we were as open and transparent as possible."*

5.4.6. Rapport

Public empathy was also emphasised during the interviews. Respondent 2 was hugely passionate about the fact that empathy was a very important factor in effective crisis communication. This respondent emphasised that the organisation had to show they were deeply sorry by removing the victims from the crisis. Where Respondent 4 discussed the vehicle defect crisis, she highlighted that once an incident has occurred, you cannot just leave it there; you have to engage with the families even if you do not agree with what happened. This does not mean that the organisation is taking liability for the crisis, it just means the organisation is showing empathy to the victim's families.

Respondent 2: "…*to be publicly empathetic in a situation like that…he was extremely empathetic…they were empathetic, they dealt with the families."*

Respondent 4: "…*you have got to at least engage with the family…"*

Respondents 5, 6 and 7 all accentuated the fact that the organisation needs to be empathetic not just during the press release but must truly ***be sorry*** by acknowledging and compensating the victims. Respondent 9 said that if you are sincere in your communications, you cannot use the word "but" after the acknowledging phrase. The best reflection of true empathy is where the CEO gets involved in the crisis situation, not to build reputational brand but to show that he truly cares for his employees or the victims. Such an example was given by Respondent 10, where the chairman got involved in an actual rescue operation of his employees.

Respondent 6: "…*you can say we are deeply sorry but you have to express sympathy.*"

Respondent 9: "*It needs to be sincere. You cannot be sorry 'but', using those kind of situations…*"

5.4.7.   Regret

The spokesperson should not just be showing rapport in the communication, this needs to go hand in hand with apologising immediately and admitting fault. This will start the process of empathy and the public will be more forgiving towards the organisation's actions that caused the crisis. If an arrogant attitude is conveyed in the communication, frustration and anger is instilled in the stakeholders. Respondent 9 stated that regret is one of the eight Rs used for effective crisis communication. Respondent 10 also highlighted that you would gain respect from your consumers and the public if you simply went out there and apologised.

Respondent 4: "…*need to apologise immediately…admit where you were wrong.*"

Respondent 9: "…*you get regret, which is arguably the most important thing. In the old days it could often put a stop there, if you say sorry. So we have seen this organisation after the stadium collusion, saying sorry. Not making them popular with other engineering firms but going out there saying I'm sorry.*"

Respondent 10: "…*something so simple that gets you a lot of respect from your consumers, just go out there and apologise. Simple thing, we take responsibility, we are responsible for the deaths.*"

5.4.8.   Resolution

Once the crisis has occurred and the organisation has acknowledged responsibility, it is important for the organisation to start the process of resolution. This involves controlling the narrative and conveying to the public what corrective measures are being taken to compensate for the damage performed.

As mentioned earlier, the spokesperson or organisation **must control the crisis and the narrative.** If the narrative is not controlled, the spokesperson will immediately be reactive

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to the public, resulting in the media and public leading the comments and statements made. Respondent 4 stressed the fact that when a crisis occurs, the public are desperate for information, so other people will come forward and talk on social media if a vacuum is left by the organisation.

> Respondent 4: "…*are desperate for information, so other people will come forward and talk. If the company does not control it at that stage, and you come in and you respond too late; in the end it sounds like you are trying to justify yourself by implying that you did not know what was going on when you needed to start speaking. You need to respond instantaneously.*"

> Respondent 10: "*Because you are responsible, you do not want to be responding, you want to be leading the narrative. They were responding, and when you are responding you do not control the narrative, you are defensive, you are in defensive mode.*"

For effective crisis communication, the organisation has to **convey messages that will lead to resolution** of the crisis and the consequences. The media and public are eager to receive feedback from the organisation. In doing so it is important for the organisation to convey what corrective measures it is putting in place to ensure that what happened does not happen again.

> Respondent 6: "…*you need to explain the corrective measures…you need to explain what you are going to do to fix it.*"

> Respondent 9: "*What are we doing right now to address it, to ring fence it…It could be we are providing grief counselling…*"

> Respondent 9: "*What are we going to do to ensure this never ever happens again?*"

5.4.9. Responsibility

Half of the respondents were of different opinion in what it means to take responsibility at the outset of the crisis communication. Some respondents said this is the start of the restoration process. Respondent 4 stressed the fact that times are changing and especially

in South Africa, where the public is starting to hold **CEOs accountable** for their actions. Respondents emphasised that organisations need to hold their CEOs accountable. Respondent 10 felt strongly that the CEO should respond straight out and take responsibility, and then show empathy as to the outcome of the crisis.

> Respondent 4: "…*immediately take responsibility…companies have to be serious to say, 'we are going to hold executives accountable' following an incident."*

> Respondent 9: "*The chief executive is on record without taking any accountability for the insane crisis."*

> Respondent 10: *"Simple thing, we take responsibility, we are responsible for the deaths. We know that this cause was found in our factory. For that, that alone we are truly sorry, we apologise, because that is not the kind of quality that we want to promote or maintain in our production facility."*

5.4.10. Restitution

Restitution starts by **expressing sympathy** for the victims, their families or the affected stakeholders. Once the stakeholders are convinced that this is honest caring, the organisation could start a process of giving back to the victims. This could be by compensating the victims, their families or the public for their loss. This is not necessarily money, the victims want to know that the company has given something that has hurt the organisation's pocket, not just a window dressing exercise but that the organisation has paramount interest to the public. Respondent 4 mentioned that it is not only about expressing sympathy but that you cannot leave the victim's families "hanging in the air" and not regularly respond to or interact with them. A lot of times, investigations are undergoing to establish the root cause of an incident, but at some stage the organisation needs to give closure to the victims' families in terms of what happened.

> Respondent 2: "…*he expressed sympathy to the victims."*

> Respondent 4: "…*you have got to at least engage with the family"*

Respondent 12: *"The reality of what happened. It will inspire confidence, to communicate the facts, communicate tirelessly, you accept responsibility when you find that something has happened, then you are in a much better situation, people will trust you, they will look to you in hearing what has happened."*

Several respondents mentioned that following a crisis, once an organisation has acknowledged responsibility, they have to not only **learn from their mistakes** but also ensure that before they start responding on social media, they know who their audience is so that the communication can be properly managed. Respondent 4 mentioned that organisations need to learn from incidents, discussing the crises that other organisations are experiencing; looking at what happened and putting actions in place to ensure that this does not happen to them.

Respondent 4: "*I think we need to learn…*"

Respondent 7: "…*before you rush out to respond to social media you have to see who put the tweets out.*"

Respondent 8: "*I think one of the other things that one can do for readiness is to look at those case studies and learn from those scenarios.*"

5.4.11. Avoiding Rationalism

During times of crises, the public does not want to see the organisation to be rational with logical arguments. The organisation must **avoid rationalism**. The organisation needs to show rapport, avoid logical responses, apologise and show the public that they are truly sorry for what has happened and care about the welfare of the public. Several respondents mentioned that the organisation needs to apologise immediately following a crisis. Similarly to a relationship where you are required to go back and apologise after you have done wrong, this is required to restore trust in a relationship. Respondents said that you gain respect when you apologise accordingly when it is required. You have to use your common sense in responding to victims and stakeholders, they elaborated. Respondent 9 said it came down to "nous" – using your common sense.

Respondent 4: "…*apologise immediately…*"

Respondent 9: "…*avoid rationalism, does not just come with a logical response...it often just comes down to nous.*"

Respondent 10: "…*something so simple that get you a lot of respect from your consumers, just go out there and apologise."*

5.4.12. Disclosure

In moving forward following a crisis, the organisation or spokesperson needs to disclose the facts of what caused the crisis. It is important to do what it takes to start the restitution process and rebuild the reputational damage caused; it cannot be left open-ended with the public. The public requires disclosure and for an organisation to be effective in its crisis communication, it needs to respond appropriately.

Respondent 4: "…*you will do what it takes, you got to do it right."*

Respondent 9: "…*it is not just enough to say you are sorry, it is not just enough to get the company Y partners to go, thank you very much, and give a handshake. We want to know why. Why do you [to] say you are sorry, why are you paying that fine, why did those partners resign?"*

5.4.13. Summary

In summary from these responses it is clear that although it is not always possible to respond within minutes, the organisation or spokesperson should have a response out within the first hour, even although not all the facts are at hand. As Respondent 1 mentioned, "You cannot do it in under an hour, and that is too long", referring to the quick response that is driven by social media.

Most of these respondents were clear that as an organisation there needs to be active response taking place. It cannot just be an initial response and then a vacuum left for the victims or public to further their conclusions in terms of what has happened or is happening. The spokesperson and organisation need to have a proactive engagement strategy once the crisis occurs to be able to control the narrative during the crisis communication process.

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Many of the crises mentioned by the respondents would have been managed more effectively if the spokespersons were actively leading the narratives and ensuring that they were controlling the crisis communications. Social media should be used by spokespersons and organisations to ensure that they are proactive in their crisis communication, and used such that organisations not only respond to stakeholders and victims, but also to employees within the organisation.

The CEO needs to be involved in most communications involving a crisis. With social media today, the risk of reputational damage is so high, the CEO should get involved – not just with severe incidents involving deaths or reputational damage to the brand but with any crisis situation. When the incident is only an issue, then the communications team can handle the situation. The public and media is unforgiving and wants to hear the message from the most senior executive, being the CEO.

All 14 respondents were quite clear that you needed to be prepared and that before you write any response, you must be clear on crafting the content of the messages to know exactly what to say and what not to say. Organisations need to know what to communicate between issue management and crisis communication, to ensure that crises do not evolve unnecessary where they could have been prevented.

It is important for spokespersons to build trust relationships upfront with the media, public and stakeholders by ensuring that they are open, honest and transparent at all times during their communications. Once the spokesperson starts responding openly with honesty and transparency, the organisation needs to come across with rapport in the media release by showing true empathy to the victims and to the public.

It is important for spokespersons or organisations to ensure that the narrative is well thought through and that the organisation immediately acknowledges responsibility so that they can lead the conversations and be in control of the communication. The organisation cannot do nothing following a crisis. Rather, it needs to implement corrective measures within the organisation to ensure it does not happen again. The organisation needs to assist the victims to deal with the consequences or institute consequence management for the persons responsible.

Restitution is started by expressing sympathy to the victims or the stakeholders. Compensation can take whatever form is important to the victims, showing them paramount interest from the organisation's side. Part of the restitution that the victims or their families require is for the organisation to admit that they have learnt from this crisis and have implemented actions to ensure that this will not happen again in the future.

The findings have shown that disclosure from the organisation is required by the victims and their families. The organisation needs to disclose what the root cause of the incident was, as well as the actions being put in place to prevent it from reoccurring. All the stakeholders require closure to move on in life. This is a very difficult and controversial final step, as it could lead to liability claims for the organisation. While some respondents mentioned that as a large organisation you cannot disclose this information, others said that organisations need to do this as part of being open and transparent. This will be part of the restoration process and minimises reputational damage for the organisation.

5.5. Results: Research Question 2b

What Behaviours Characterise Ineffective Crisis Communication Management?

Behaviours that characterise ineffective crisis communication are very much the opposite of effective crisis communication. In discussing this question with respondents, it was evident that there are certain aspects of ineffective crisis communication that respondents mentioned should not happen.

5.5.1. Attempting to Build Relationships with Media During Crises

Respondents mentioned that it was ineffective to attempt to **build a relationship** with either the media or the public during crisis situations. The main focus during crisis communication was to be apologetic and empathetic, not to be seen to be building the organisation's brand or relationships.

> Respondent 3: *"If you are building a relationship in the middle of a crisis, then I am sorry, you are done. That relationship should be built beforehand."*

Respondent 8*: "If the journalists do not know you and you do not know them, you are going to have a very big problem. And not because they have that intention, that trust needs to be built way before ahead of the time."*

Respondent 9: *"The worst times to be making friends is in the middle of a crisis."*

When she was explaining the crisis situation, Respondent 6 was adamant about how the organisation failed to respond and was **absent** in its communications, which caused damage to their brand value.

Respondent 4*: "Company X did that – they try and build themselves up with 'we have not met our own standards'. It is a lot of rubbish and people do not like you trying to deflect attention away from the problem."*

Respondent 6: *"I would think it is ineffective if they had quite an impact on the company's brand value, on the company's reputation."*

5.5.2. Negative Response

In today's time of social media communications, it is essential for an organisation to respond fast when a crisis occurs. It is ineffective for spokespersons to be too **slow in responding** or not responding at all. As stated previously, when there is no response or a slow response, it creates a vacuum; one that will be filled by the public or other commentators. Someone will respond – especially on social media – and more often than not, it is incorrect information that is communicated, often in the form of negative comments reacting to the organisation not responding at all.

Respondent 3: *"They were reputationally quite severely impacted when things happened and they would take quite a while to respond."*

Respondent 7: *"When you do not say anything, you leave a vacuum, and somebody is going to fill it."*

Respondent 8: "*Delayed response is ineffective. In these days social media again does not allow for hours and hours on end while people are deciding what to say."*

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Being *unprepared* in crisis communication was stressed as very ineffective. The spokesperson had to be a person of authority who knew what was happening and had sufficient information at hand to be prepared to answer the questions posed by the media and the public. The PR practitioners mentioned that the media or public do not want to correspond with a person who has to refer questions back to senior authorities.

> Respondent 3: *"They were very unsophisticated in how they managed crises before we became involved. It was very ad hoc and it was very kneejerk, most of the time it was avoidance of comments or response."*

> Respondent 8: *"Which is why preparation is important even prior to the crisis…"*

To have *no empathy* during the crisis communication is very ineffective. Respondents stressed that the organisation must apologise as the first step, indicating they are truly sorry for the crisis that has occurred. Several incidents were discussed where organisations had failed to be empathetic in their response. This ineffective response would lead directly to reputational damage, as the victims and public will have no mercy on the organisation.

> Respondent 2: *"No empathy, no understanding of what was required by the media, no understanding of how to interact with media in a crisis communication situation."*

> Respondent 3: *"There should have been a 'we care, we deeply care, we are so concerned. These are the steps we are taking to make sure it never happens again and this is what we are doing to deal with what has been impacted'."*

> Respondent 10: *"For that, that alone we are truly sorry, we apologise, because …"*

Respondents mentioned that *missing deadlines* is very ineffective, not just to the crisis communication situation but also in destroying trust relationships with journalists and with stakeholders. If a journalist has requested information and has been polite enough to wait for a response so they can meet their deadline, then the relationship needs to be respected. Journalists have a task of submitting cutting-edge information within their time frames. With

today's social media trend, journalists have to post immediately or risk losing the opportunity of communicating news headlines.

> Respondent 7: *"…you have got to get back to them, quickly, before the deadline. And when you get back, you have got to have something that you can tell them."*
>
> Respondent 8: *"So committing to your deadlines. If you are going to say to the guy, and he has already missed his deadline, waiting for you to come back in two hours and you do not come back in two hours you are letting the guy down. He has a job to do."*

When spokespersons or organisations are **not being authentic** it is very ineffective. This could be not sharing factual information, being secretive or withholding information. As soon as the media or public notice that an organisation is not authentic, the trust relationship will be broken and it will be very difficult and time-consuming to rebuild – especially not during a crisis situation.

> Respondent 3: *"There is a very big difference in how you position it and you know people are so quick to be angry when they feel that you have not been human and you have not been authentic."*

> Respondent 4: *"…what you cannot do is to hide things when there is a possibility that your activities as a company can actually be doing harm."*

> Respondent 7: *"…withholding information or being secretive, only being reactive."*

5.5.3.   Traditional Communication

Respondents mentioned that although companies are starting to realise they need to respondent more effectively, several companies still have the tendency to want to respond the **old fashioned way** of preparing a media release and wanting to send it out when they are ready. Organisations have to realise that social media does not wait for an organisation to respond, regardless of who they are. When a crisis breaks out, the public responds immediately on social media. Organisations must look at updating their systems and procedures to keep up with social media.

Respondent 3: *"I have to say that a lot of the larger organisations in South Africa do not see it this way, they have quite an old way of working, and quite an offensive way."*

Respondent 7: *"What the company was doing was, they were communicating to their employees through posters and through briefings and was taking too long to get there because the union was getting out really quickly."*

Respondents also said that organisations need to state what the **corrective measures** are when they are responding following a crisis. If this resolution is not performed quickly enough, it can damage the organisation's reputation quicker than they think they should have responded.

Respondent 6: *"…it would not be explaining quickly enough what the corrective actions are."*

Respondent 9: *"They messed up their resolution and it took months to try to get your vehicle repaired."*

Respondent 10: *"…second mistake, they failed to actually communicate and take action immediately."*

Some respondents were of the opinion that you **do not get the lawyers involved**, as they delay the response process, which results in the stakeholders wondering what is happening and why the lawyers are responding, or why the narrative is very legalistic. Respondent 9 was of the opinion that if you get lawyers involved, they are only interested in winning a case. However, their opinion was that the legal team needs to be part of the crisis team, but overall the CEO must take accountability and ensure that the narrative is empathetic.

Respondent 9: *"…get lawyers involved, the lawyers are important, but the legal approach is, say nothing, say it slowly, you win a court case perhaps, in two years' time, but then there is nothing to win in the end."*

Respondent 11: *"…there was no legal communication about this, this is serious, I'm handling it as a CEO and we are not going to try and hide it in any way."*

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The other opinion is that the response needs to be approved by the legal entity to ensure that whatever is said, the organisation cannot be held liable in court cases. This is mostly found with large corporates, where they will wait for the legal response before they communicate.

> Respondent 12: *"You have got to avoid creating a situation where you can be held liable as a company. The reason why legal people advise that you do not admit to liability is because you want to create a situation where every effect is known. Every reason why things are what they are is known, then we can only represent ourselves for the company."*

> Respondent 14*: "You do have many companies, and I will talk generally, many companies that have very conservative legal counsel who essentially will not want to say anything."*

5.5.4. Poor CEO Response

Various respondents were voicing their opinion about how ineffective CEOs could be during their crisis communication. This ranged from where CEOs were **too important** to discuss the crisis with the PR practitioners and waited as it may for the situation to pass, to where the CEOs simply had a bad attitude in their response and were disrespectful to the media. The respondents were adamant that the CEO is the external face of the organisation and that the buck stops there.

> Respondent 2: *"…CEO was nowhere to be seen for days and days. We understand that they did eventually visit the victims in hospital, but not publicly and that is not good enough."*

> Respondent 6: *"We work with a few CEOs where they are either dismissive towards the media or they are too important to want to speak to the media until we have a headline…"*

Respondents mentioned that if the CEOs do **not have a visual identity**, their crisis communication is ineffective. This ideally should have been in place before the crisis, but

during the crisis the CEO should be seen and not only heard, otherwise a perception is created that the CEO is hiding away from responsibility.

> Respondent 14: *"…if it is a legal situation, multiple fatalities, for the CEO to duck out of the way for a long period of time makes it look as if this guy is trying to evade any kind of responsibility. It would definitely not seem empathetic if he comes across the other way, which is not going to be good."*

5.5.5. Summary

In summary, respondents stressed that to build relationships during crisis situations was very ineffective. Organisations needed not to be absent during a crisis to ensure their reputation was not damaged.

Respondents further noted that communication which affected negative responses was also ineffective. This ranged from being slow to respond after the crisis had occurred, to being unprepared in the response message and not having empathy during the response. Respondents stated that if trust relationships were built with journalists, under no circumstances should their deadlines be missed, as this would result in journalists not trusting the spokesperson or the CEO.

Traditional communication was ineffective. Organisations that responded in old-fashioned ways had to learn from other, more modern organisations how to respond, or contract with professional consultants to give advice and coach them accordingly. Respondents also mentioned that corrective measures had to be part of the messages to victims or their families as part of the restoration process. The viewpoints were mixed regarding having the legal team involved in crisis communication. Where the response following a crisis was legalistic, this was very ineffective. The respondents were of the opinion that the legal team had to be involved to review the narratives to ensure the organisation could not be held liable with incorrect statements made by the spokesperson or the CEO.

Respondents emphasised that poor CEO response was very ineffective. CEOs had to ensure that they were properly trained for a crisis communication response. They were not to be "too important" to appear in front of the media to answer their questions following a crisis incident. To ensure there was a proper trust relationship with the media and the stakeholders, the CEO has to ensure he has a visual identity on social media. The CEO

was not only to attempt to create an identity when a crisis occurs. Lastly, spokespersons or CEOs should be mindful of not being reactive or inauthentic in their communications, as this was also seen to be very ineffective.

5.6. Results: Research Question 3a

What Organisational Drivers Enabled Effective Crisis Communication Management?

The highest number of categories of codes emerged when the topic of enabling effective crisis communication was covered. In the following section, the codes that emerged with the most quotations will be discussed. Other codes that emerged individually from respondents have not been discussed as they were not verified with other respondents.

The strongest opinions were made regarding what characteristics the CEO should have. In most cases the CEO was regarded as the most important spokesperson and it was concluded that the CEO should be the spokesperson in not only significant incidents, but as far as possible to build the reputation of the organisation. It was important for the CEO or the spokesperson to build trust relationships with not only the media but with all stakeholders. Stakeholder communication that was built upfront prior to crises occurring definitely enabled effective crisis communication for organisations. This ensured that the organisation had a proactive engagement strategy when the crisis communication took place.

Organisations had to ensure that they had crisis communication plans in place, which involved identifying the risks to the organisation, having protocols in place, performing emergency exercises and knowing what the response plans would be in the unforeseen event of a crisis taking place. As mentioned, the organisation had to have proper risk management policies and procedures in place to enable effective crisis communication within the organisation.

Organisations had to realise that social media has changed the landscape and CEOs and spokespersons had to use this platform to enable their communication, so that the reputation of their organisations would not be damaged. This meant being reputationally resilient in all aspects of managing the organisation's reputation and brand.

Respondents lastly discussed the importance of the spokesperson used during a crisis. As previously noted, the CEO is expected to have visual identity in front of the organisation's stakeholders but there could be instances where other spokespersons or PR practitioners were to be used.

5.6.1. Characteristics of the CEO

In the discussions it was evident that various respondents were adamant that the CEO was to be the spokesperson. The qualities of the CEOs were discussed and various themes emerged from this discussion.

The respondents were divided as to when the CEO should be the spokesperson. The first group of respondents were of the opinion that whenever there is a crisis, the **CEO must be the spokesperson**. Their reasoning was that a crisis could possibly affect the reputational brand of the organisation – something which you do not want to leave in someone else's hands. If there was an issue, then a corporate communications officer could do the speaking. With a crisis that affects stakeholders, people want to hear from the CEO and not receive a watered-down response from a PR practitioner or corporate communications officer.

> Respondent 2: *"It is a golden rule of disaster management; the CEO must be there."*

> Respondent 3: *"The CEO is normally the spokesperson, or the CFO would be the spokesperson."*

> Respondent 10: *"It is always got to be the CEO, because when you are in crisis. You know King 4 … the CEO is the primary spokesperson for the organisation. It is part of his judiciary duty. You cannot outsource it to the marketing person or your consultant."*

The other respondents stated that the CEO should not do the initial communication, unless it was severe where deaths were involved, reputational brand was impacted or significant financial impact occurred to the business. The corporate communications officer or public practitioner would do the talking, reserving the important communications for the CEO, or where there is good news to communicate or where the matter escalates and becomes severe.

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Respondent 8: *"…at the beginning when the things are still brewing up you would use your first line, which is your head of corporate affairs, executive of corporate affairs. But as the matter escalates you need the engagement of the CEO."*

Respondent 9: *"Ideally it should be the chief exec. Often there is a strategy of we'll let the chief exec announce good news, we solved it, we are doing this. Then you let somebody else do the bad news stuff..."*

Six of the respondents were of the opinion that the modern **CEO needed to know how social media worked** and needed to be actively responsive on social media. This should be a way of living for the CEO to be active on social media in goods times when everything is going well.

Respondent 4: *"…the modern CEO should be on social media, be in touch with how you speak on social media. It is very powerful in crisis response, you will see the CEO will often respond out from itself, which is quite powerful. Make sure they know how it works."*

Respondent 6: *"Sometimes its fear and we do find that some of our clients' C-suites and CEOs are not even on social media, so if you go to them saying there is an issue brewing here, and they are like…but it is on social media and they are not on it."*

In effective crisis communication it was discussed that the spokesperson must respond quickly. In enabling effective crisis communication, it is important that the **CEO responds quickly** when he or she is required to. The CEO needs to be responsive on social media and not shy away from the media, hoping the problem will go away. Sometimes the CEO needs to respond really quickly, as the crisis could affect the organisation's licence to operate.

Respondent 5: *"I have had a conservative CEO, who would not like to do profiling with the media, but when there is an issue he would be available and understanding. Completely uncharismatic, but somebody who can respond. Who understands when it is critical to respond and therefore responds appropriately."*

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Respondent 10: *"…a mine that collapsed in the US and there were guys who were trapped. I cannot remember if they actually found them, or pulled them out, but the chairman, the way he handled this thing. He was not doing interviews on the 13th floor using tricks. He was underground, in the mine with the guys working."*

In enabling crisis communication, respondents discussed that it was crucial for the **CEO to be empathetic** in his or her response. Where CEOs were involved in the crisis situation it showed that they care about the victims. As social media brings the public so close to the CEO of an organisation, when things go wrong they want to hear it from the CEO. The CEO is the face of the company and should be the person showing sympathy and being empathetic.

Respondent 2: *"…the CEO has to be seen in the modern world, he has to be seen to be on it, to be empathetic, to say 'I do not know what the cause is, but we are working on it'."*

Respondent 3: *"The CEO should have gone to the hospitals where people were. He should have been on the ground. There should have been a 'we care, we deeply, deeply care, we are so concerned' attitude."*

Five respondents focussed on the **quality of leadership** having an influence on responsibility taken for effective crisis communication. Respondents mentioned that quality of leadership stemmed from the culture of the organisation, but that leaders needed to be open and honest, ethical, credible and trustworthy.

Respondent 4: *"…willingly and unwillingly it shows up ethical leaders, versus unethical leaders, so I think companies should start thinking about the type of CEOs they employ."*

Respondent 8: *"Leadership in the organisation. Culture, a much based culture where it is known in the company and outside these are the types of people I'm dealing with. Credible, trustworthy, those types of virtues."*

Respondent 10: *"It is the quality of the leadership and leadership competence".*

Accountability came out very strongly during the discussions. Many respondents felt that social media has changed the landscape of today's world. It is perhaps not that more crises are taking place but that more crises are becoming known. Organisations cannot hide crises anymore, as their employees also know what is happening and word spreads so fast on social media. All the more reason for CEOs to be accountable for their actions and then to be held liable when they are guilty of mismanagement.

> Respondent 4: *"It is always about how to hold someone accountable. I think it is a good thing that people can ultimately be held accountable for what they do."*

When CEOs are expected to perform crisis communication following a crisis, it is very intense and draining for such a person, especially if fatalities have occurred. The ***CEO is expected to be visual*** in the public and very often can go days with very little sleep in the initial days of response. It is essential for the CEO to know what to say and for the corporate communications department to be prepared with an alternative spokesperson who can relieve the CEO when required.

> Respondent 8: *"I think you have to have the main guy being able to respond and understanding the importance of responding and making himself available. If you do not have that guy, the damage could be bigger than you have expected."*

5.6.2. Building Trust Relationships with Stakeholders

As mentioned earlier, a key strategy is for the organisation to be ***building trust relationships*** not just during the crisis but also long before, as part of their daily operations. All the respondents emphasised this important enabling factor. Respondents stressed the fact that it was important to build the trust relationships with the organisations and the CEOs upfront before the crisis occurred. They referred to this as a two-way relationship or a partnership relationship.

> Respondent 3: *"If you are building a relationship in the middle of a crisis, then I am sorry, you are done. That relationship should be built beforehand, based on the value from things like your thought leadership, because the media wants data, they want facts, they want stuff that is different."*

Respondent 4: *"…the best thing you can do beforehand, is value those relationships and it also gives you feedback…"*

Respondent 9: *"…building relationships in times of peace, very, very important."*

Respondents did, however, say that you may use the opportunity to **build trust during a crisis**, not only with the media but also with your own employees. If a company did not know you or the CEO, it would be very dangerous to try and build relationships but it is possible. Dangerous because if the public thinks that you are trying to "convince" the victims to like the company, this could result in very negative publicity.

Respondent 4: *"There is a huge opportunity to build trust during a crisis because sometimes people do not know about your company, so it depends on what company you are."*

Respondent 7: *"We not only communicated with the media but also with the employees because they are a huge source of information and you want them to have the facts and figures, but we also had to do regular reports and things to the board."*

Part of building trust relationships is taking the effort to **capacitate employees as ambassadors** for the organisations. Six respondents highlighted the fact that your employees are your most important stakeholders, especially when there is a crisis.

Respondent 7: *"I told them the employees need to know what the story was. I said they can be your ambassadors. They work in the company."*

Respondent 9: *"Your biggest stakeholders are your employees, before you think about anything else you have got to take your employees with."*

Respondent 10: *"Trust me, I would believe what a middle or low level of employee at a company says, to what they say on social media or personally. It is important that you bring them on board and they help you communicate through their different circles of influence."*

Part of enabling effective crisis communication is **building trust relationships with the media**. The media need to trust the spokesperson when information is given to the journalist. If there is not a trust relationship, the journalist will wonder if the information is credible or not.

> Respondent 7: *"The media were quite happy with that because they knew what they were getting, I mean the CEO would tell them exactly what I would tell them."*

> Respondent 10: *"…in our business we develop a trust relationship with the media, with our clients. So when you advise a client you have to tell the truth. And when we tell journalists offline, this is what truly happened, they believe it because we have established a reputation…"*

5.6.3.   Stakeholder Communication

Communication measures with stakeholders are key to enabling effective crisis communication. This does not mean how to communicate but rather, to be in a communication rhythm with all stakeholders – not only the media but also the public, employees, shareholders and also communities of influence. As the first respondent mentioned, public relations does not exist anymore but rather, communications. Employees were also regarded as the most important stakeholders as they are on social media and know everything about the company – the good, the bad and the ugly.

> Respondent 2: "*Tell your staff, because your staff will be on social media as soon as it happens, and you have to be as fast as they are."*

> Respondent 7: *"…communicating with all stakeholders, so not just with one but remember that there are others. And because employees go home and talk at the dinner table and the husband or wife goes to play poker or tennis and she talks to somebody and you cannot believe how things get around because somebody chatted to someone at home."*

5.6.4. Crisis Preparedness Plans

All the respondents discussed the topic of having crisis preparedness plans or emergency response plans in place. Large corporates have detailed crisis plans in place but not so for small companies, which do not experience crises every week. The topics discussed by the respondents varied from having procedures and process flows in place to defining the communication plans discussing who says what, what hymn sheets or templates are to be used and if the legal department should be involved in crisis communication. Performing scenario planning or actually arranging crisis exercises was discussed in depth. This ranged from arranging social media crises to having the whole community involved in the exercise. Respondents also mentioned that executives need to receive crisis communication training throughout their careers and not just as a once-off training session. They said this must be done continually, on a yearly basis even, to the extent of arranging proper journalists and giving television exposure to the CEO. One respondent mentioned that it is critical for organisations to know who the stakeholders in every crisis situation are, to be able to respond appropriately. Mitigation measures were also discussed, as well as what recovery plans are in place to ensure that proper and swift restoration takes place.

Respondents all agreed that you need proper ***crisis preparedness procedures and systems*** in place within every organisation to ensure that there is control in executing the crisis management actions. Moreover, process flows need to be known within the organisation, especially by the crisis response teams. It does not help to have a 100-page procedure and when the crisis hits, everyone is running to find out what the procedure is. Everyone needs to know and understand what is expected of them during a crisis.

> Respondent 1: *"…you need a proper system. We have a very comprehensive template, so you almost just fill in the blocks and you have a full media release that you can send immediately, or not really a media release, we call it an incident descriptor."*

> Respondent 10: *"…what is important is the processes, because you will never know what the crises that will hit you are. You cannot really have this holding statement. You do not know what the statement will say if you do not know what the crisis is about and the issues involved are about."*

Respondent 12: *"However, their crises management system totally integrates the communication…"*

Various respondents mentioned that it was important to have defined the **crisis teams** upfront as part of preparing for a crisis. The crisis teams varied in composition from the CEO, usually performing the role of the crisis leader, to internal communications staff, external public practitioners, human resources, the Executive Committee (Exco) representative, crisis managers and the legal team.

Respondent 6: *"So the first thing for your scenario is, because different scenarios have different spokespeople, you would have a crisis team so there would be a leader of the crisis."*

Respondent 10: *"So you will have a communications team that includes leadership and the communication people, and the lawyers and the people who actually understands of the technicalities issues that you are hit with. So if it is manufacturing, you literally have a manufacturing expert there, if it is a health issue you bring in the health experts."*

Part of the crisis preparedness plan is to **know who the stakeholders are** in every crisis situation. The normal stakeholders, being the employees, shareholders and community, is always known. The problem is if an important stakeholder is not thought of during the crisis situation when everything is going wrong, as this could be the stakeholder that causes the most damage to the organisation's reputation.

Respondent 9: *"For me the best feature of any policy is its stakeholder lists, because in a midst of a crisis you tend to forget who your stakeholders are, and the people who are most important, often are not the one shouting the loudest."*

Respondent 10: *"So you categorise each person's interest. Then you also do a ranking of the stakeholders. Who is the most important in terms of number one? Their ability to influence other stakeholders as well? And then you prioritise in terms of the most important stakeholder, this is their interest, this is what they would like to see come out here and then you respond accordingly."*

Crisis communications plans are part of the crisis preparedness plans to ensure the organisation knows how to communicate during a crisis. Usually these procedures are very elaborate but the essential parts need to be highlighted and must be available when a crisis hits.

> Respondent 2: *"…it is more commonly known as your crises communications plan and it is part of the broader disaster recovery plan."*

> Respondent 8: *"Factors that enable are preparedness plans and proactiveness. Preparedness both in terms of the systems and people who have to deal with media."*

The respondents were varied in terms of having *pre-prepared check sheets* or hymn sheets as some referred to it. Some of the respondents said you do not have the time during a crisis to read the thick policy manual or look for templates that you need to be agile in the way you respond. When a crisis occurs, everything is hectic and if the spokesperson is not enabled in the thought process, this will lead to critical information that is not communicated to the stakeholders.

> Respondent 1: *"…you need approved templates more or less. In certain instances it might become necessary if it is a really significant event, but then we would rather get guidance from the insurance than from legal."*

> Respondent 7: *"That is also when you have got a bit of a hymn sheet makes a difference."*

> Respondent 9: *"There would be fact sheets, the stuff you can prepare, holding statements."*

Every crisis preparedness plan needs to have *protocol* to follow as part of enabling the spokespersons. This protocol could be tedious but if it is not thought through beforehand, especially in large organisations, it will cause major delays during the crisis to obtain approvals for what is to be said.

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Respondent 7: *"Do not have these long approval processes, especially in a crisis which could be reputational damaging, have somebody to sign off."*

Respondent 8: *"We have an understanding that, especially with social media you have to be able to say without even anybody vetting it at a higher level, we are looking into this matter and will revert."*

Respondents were divided as to whether the **legal department had to have sight of the crisis message** prior to broadcasting it or whether the legal department drafted the response. Large corporates were more prone to having the legal and insurance departments vet the response or at least be part of the crisis team to ensure that there is no legal liability that could be enforced against the organisation at a later stage. Respondent 8, however, said it was important to ensure that the response does not sound legalistic, otherwise this could be damaging to the organisation's reputation.

Respondent 1: *"The legal person was actually our contact, so all the information went through her to us, but of course they have a line of sight of everything, all our procedures at some stage."*

Respondent 3: *"I think legal has to be a key part of that proactive mitigation process, proactive scenario building, because then they have time to approve certain things. At some stage the leadership of the business has to say 'sorry, reputation is actually more important than whether this word is the correct word or not'."*

Respondent 12 was very adamant that the legal department had to have sight of all communication prior to being communicated so that the organisation could not be held liable for someone saying incriminating.

Respondent 12: *"When you are in a situation like that, you have to avoid incriminating yourself basically, in terms of managing the incident. You have got to avoid creating a situation where you can be held liable as a company. The reason why legal people advise that you do not admit to liability is because you want to create a situation where every effect is known, every reason why things are what they are is known, then we can only represent ourselves for the company. That is why, from a communications*

perspective, not everybody is actually encouraged to speak to the media because you could be innocently saying there have been injuries…"

A critical component of the crisis preparedness plan is to identify different crises and then perform **scenario planning** of these to understand what the actions will be to manage the crises. Many respondents mentioned that you cannot plan for every crisis situation but that the intention is to highlight the highest risks in the organisation and then to think through possible scenario plans to be more prepared. All of the respondents stressed the fact that emergency exercises are to be held frequently to ensure everyone is ready.

Respondent 4: *"So for me, it is important that executives understand how important it is before the time. Then do a bit of scenario planning and just make sure that you are very agile and everyone has got everyone's numbers."*

Respondent 6: *"In the scenario planning we analyse the potential scenario impact like the red, orange and green (traffic light concept), for each one of those we sort of prepare a response."*

Respondent 10: *"…to have those exercises to create a crisis only a handful of people know that the crisis is not real, everybody else presumes it's happening and it is happening in real time. And we test how well they respond to it."*

Crisis communication training was mentioned during most respondents' interviews. This concept is essential not only for the spokespersons but for the whole executive team. Executives are trained in normal media interviews but need to be exposed to crisis communications as these are more intense than normal, friendly interviews.

Respondent 3: *"We run protocol and response training for clients where we work with frontline-facing staff who are dealing with what is going on, how to respond in that situation."*

Respondent 5: *"…for major clients we do big depth media training sessions twice a year with a belief that nobody has not recently been media trained for the last six months and is allowed to act as a spokesperson for the organisation."*

Respondent 7: *"…all CEOs, CFOs and people who could need to be used as spokespeople should get media training in advance."*

All organisations should not only have crisis preparedness plans but should also think about what is required as **recovery plans**. Once the crisis has occurred, the public is waiting in devastation to firstly see how the organisation is going to manage the crisis, then what the organisation is going to do to restore the situation. If the organisation does not respond well in their restoration phase, this could cause further reputational damage to the brand.

Respondent 2: *"The bigger you are, the more you must have a disaster recovery plan. From a business continuity perspective, from your shareholder/stakeholder communication perspective."*

Respondent 5: *"…then there is a recovery phase that must come quite quickly. But if you move into recovery before you have dealt with the crisis, you will just trigger another crisis."*

Respondent 9: *"Resolution. What are we doing right now to address it, to ring fence it?"*

5.6.5. Risk Management

Risk management is key to every organisation. Another organisational behaviour that enables effective crisis communication is for the organisation to know the possible risks to the organisation by compiling a risk register. Then it is essential to understand what the likelihood is of the crisis occurring, what the consequences are and how the organisation will respond to mitigate the crisis. Most organisations think this is enough and stop here with the process. The secret is to continue and as it will, play the crisis out, think what the implications are and how the organisation should respond to manage the situation. Once the crises have been identified, possible warning signs or flag raisers should be discussed and then implemented to ensure the organisation is warned in time before the crisis occurs.

Respondent 3: *"…what we are seeing now is more forward-thinking organisations where the risk committee sits together and puts together the organisational risk plan…"*

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Respondent 4: *"The executives need to sit down and think of what are our main risks to our brand and that is what I would look at."*

Respondent 8*: "Plan before it hits crisis levels. Identifying risks, to find the risk before in your own environment and your own quiet time."*

5.6.6.   Social Media

The ***use of social media*** is an organisational behaviour that should be used to enable effective crisis communication. Social media has changed the whole platform of media communications. Organisations must be on top of social media and not be caught on the back foot. As such, organisations need to know what is happening on social media by monitoring the different sites to ensure that the organisation stays in control of what is being said, so the consequences could be determined.

Respondent 6: *"If you got good monitoring tools, you have to monitor what happens on Black Twitter for example, and Black Twitter is powerful. You have to monitor what happens on social media, so monitoring tools are important."*

Respondent 7: *"You have got to have a good social media monitoring system in place, and you have got to have good analyses of who is saying it, who is following it [and] does it influence the decision-making."*

Respondent 10: *"We are monitoring how our messaging is being received out there and you need to have real-time monitoring processes of how the narrative is developing, out in the market."*

5.6.7.   Reputation Management

The theme of Reputation Resilience was identified in the discussion with Respondent 3, who was quite adamant that this was created around six factors which create a protective barrier around the client. These six factors, as shown in Appendix M, are your stakeholders, thought leadership platforms, visual identification, community, shared value, and crisis proactive mitigation. All these factors are required to help create a protective barrier around the client, so that when a crisis hits the organisation, these factors could be used as enablers to ensure the organisation's brand is not damaged. The six factors that form this

protective barrier around the client comprise the ***Reputation Resilience,*** which is the "bank of goodwill" (Appendix M) for the organisation. This bank of goodwill, together with the Mitigation Measures, ensures that the organisation will perform effective crisis communication. This goodwill is built up over years of having good relationships with not only the media but also public stakeholders.

This could also be seen as the reputation strategy for the organisation. The reputation of the company is critical and it is essential that everyone in the organisation helps to build this. Reputation takes years to build but can be destroyed in seconds.

> Respondent 3: *"Your bank of goodwill comes from your resilience, which is all your normal …what people say in corporate affairs…"*

> Respondent 5: *"Reputation strategy is a three to five-year project. Obviously the quicker you want it, the more money you will spend and the longer you want it, the less money you will spend, but you will live with the consequence that the reputation is fully formed. It is also the quickest thing that you can destroy."*

> Respondent 9: *"The worst times to be making friends is in the middle of a crisis. That speaks to putting in place, building goodwill during times of peace."*

Stakeholders are important in building an organisation's reputation. Without stakeholders, a company would not have a reputation. Your stakeholders need to endorse you through the life of your company because when you need them during a time of crisis, you want to push their buttons to support you.

> Respondent 3: *"…that is where your stakeholders become very important because people are going to go to other people and ask what is your opinion on what has been happening and so you have to make sure that this network of third parties endorse you…"*

> Respondent 6*: "This is once again a relationships coming to the fore when you're in crisis mode. Because then you can call all your good friends, whether they are regulators, industry opinion makers to back you up."*

Part of building the reputation for the company is ***thought leadership***. Leaders should be building relationships and adding value beforehand with their stakeholders. This includes sending out company reports of information that could be of value to other organisations. Leaders should be getting involved with the local community and adding value to their lives and other initiatives that add value, explaining why your organisation matters to other people.

> Respondent 3: "*But relationship should be built beforehand, based on the value from things like your thought leadership, because the media wants data, they want facts, they want stuff that is different.*"

> Respondent 4: "*…people are watching to see if your company have responsible leadership or not.*"

Organisations are required, from reputational management's perspective, to ensure that their CEOs have ***visual identity*** in the public domain. It is not good for the CEO to only show up once the crisis breaks; he needs to be visible throughout the organisation's life. Visual ID includes the organisation's website, social media pages and even advertising.

> Respondent 3: "*Visual ideas are very important. Visual ID involves your social media; it is your website. So it is everything on how do I create a protective barrier around the client.*"

The organisation needs to build reputation with all its stakeholders and especially with its local ***community***. The existence of organisations depends on communities and if communities are negative about an organisation or decide to boycott an organisation, it could lead to their downfall.

> Respondent 1: "*…bear in mind that our employees and our community is our first priority…*"

> Respondent 12: "*A company's reputation is often how well you managed a crisis, how it shows, and the humanitarian action that was done.*"

Respondent 13: "So if you have a good reputation as it stands, if you are credible and a well-established entity, you will see that engages with all stakeholders on a regular basis, whether it is your employees, whether it is the unions, your communities, your key customers, clients and most importantly your media."

Reputations are built on **shared value** between the organisation and its stakeholders. This starts internally, with the organisation building shared value with its employees and shareholders, who are the ambassadors of the organisation. If this is not correct, the culture within the organisation will not be right to keep the reputation of the company strong. The external stakeholders are influenced by the goodwill of the organisation, ensuring that shared value is created between the community, suppliers, clients and the public.

Respondent 3: *"…for me, it would be a shared value. Commercial opportunity in societal challenge, which also helps you in your reputation resilience and builds up that authentic bank of goodwill for when the paw-paw hits the fan."*

Respondent 6: *"The campaign we have to focus on is to focus on their values."*

Respondent 9: *"This does not represent the values you come to know and trust."*

Once a crisis occurs it is essential for the spokesperson to start **proactively mitigating the crisis** situation to ensure the reputational brand is not damaged in this process. The longer the crisis keeps going, the higher the likelihood that the organisation's reputational brand, which that has been built up over the years, will be broken down. Organisations are used to knowing that nothing can affect their status or their brand. But in today's time of social media, an organisation's brand can become tarnished in minutes and destroyed in hours.

Respondent 6: *"…we built a reputation over the past 12 years, we pushed them way ahead, and we did a series of interventions with media, analysts..."*

Respondent 12: *"If you do not manage it well, your reputation of the entity is in trouble."*

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A few respondents mentioned that it is of value to have a **reputational dashboard** within the organisation. This could be utilised as a standing arrangement where all the possible risks have been identified in a robot dashboard, but also during a crisis situation, with the red, orange and green robots being used for the severity of the crisis.

> Respondent 5: *"There was a reputational dashboard issued to us as to where we are every single day and what specific thing happened."*

The **culture of the organisation** plays a huge role in forming the reputation of the organisation. The employees are seen as ambassadors to the company and can easily make or break the reputation. When a crisis occurs, the employees are maybe not the first to know, but they will have the inside information and the facts of the crisis. If this relationship is not managed correctly, the reputation of the organisation could be at risk.

> Respondent 8: *"…if you have a culture where employees understand the type of place in which they work and they buy into those values themselves, it helps a lot."*

> Respondent 10: *"I think the corporate culture, not in one organisation but all around, where it is almost incarcerated in people's thinking. Especially people within marketing and communications departments."*

5.6.8. Having the correct spokesperson

From the discussions it emerged that the spokesperson is an important enabler to effective crisis communication. The most prominent code that emerged was that the spokesperson had to be **available immediately**. Someone has to get up and communicate with the stakeholders as quickly as possible after a crisis has occurred. This person had to be dedicated in actively responding on frequent occasions. A situation should not arise where a vacuum has been created due to a lack of response.

> Respondent 2: *"…he took charge, he interacted immediately with the media, and he expressed sympathy to the victims."*

> Respondent 4: *"You cannot have a bureaucracy where he or she is 10 phone calls away, so you have got to understand those things and even on social media, things*

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can go so wrong on social media that you need a very senior person who can make
a quick decision on how that response should be handled."
Respondent 5: "…we had a dedicated resource that spent all day every day including
weekends for over a year responding to people's queries on the crisis."

Respondents mostly said that once the crisis communication starts, it was essential to have only **one spokesperson** who communicates to the stakeholders. This was to ensure that the same message was conveyed to all the stakeholders and that damage could not be done by several spokespersons saying contradicting messages. Some respondents did, however, say that it was not always possible but that you had to ensure you were consistent in the messages delivered.

Respondent 1: *"…we are following the route of only one person speaks to the media…"*

Respondent 7: *"Preferably being that single briefed competent spokesperson. Also somebody who does not just regurgitate what is in the questions and answers but really has an understanding for the business and what is going on."*

Respondents were adamant that the spokesperson, whoever they were, had to have a **high level of authority**. The media and public do not want to hear from someone who does not have facts, cannot answer the questions and cannot take responsibility for the crisis.

Respondent 4: *"…you have a high level of authority in responding as soon as journalists are asking questions."*

Respondent 7: *"They gave me the authority to talk to the media on their behalf…I was given authority to answer every question the media asked. On an ongoing basis."*

Respondents said it was important to have a **competent and experienced spokesperson** doing the talking. You could not have junior people acting as the company spokesperson, as the risk of them saying something wrong or getting caught out by the journalists would be very high. Moreover, stakeholders and the public want to hear from someone who has authority as who is competent in what they are saying. Respondents further mentioned that

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while the spokesperson need not be a subject matter expert, they had to be knowledgeable of the crisis situation to be able to answer the questions asked.

Respondent 4: *"Do not get a social media intern to respond on social media."*

Respondent 7: *"Preferably being that single briefed competent spokesperson."*

Respondent 8: *"…the more it escalates, the more you have to escalate internally to say this is no longer somebody in communications that needs to speak. You are now speaking to an information technology expert from the other side, you need to speak to an equivalent who understands the terms who can respond quickly. Otherwise you will also risk putting somebody who does not know what they are talking about upfront and then you have a problem."*

Some respondents said that the **CEO is not always the spokesperson**, only when the crisis affects the reputational brand of the organisation, fatalities have occurred in the crisis or major financial loss has resulted. Otherwise, the CEO should be reserved for messages regarding good news and the communications staff left to deal with the rest of the communications.

Respondent 4: *"If it is a small issue, then you give that to that sort of regional person. So I would say a big crisis that affects your company brand broadly, it should be the CEO."*

Respondent 9: *"…there is a strategy of we'll let the chief exec announce good news. We solved it, we are doing this. Then you let somebody else do the bad news stuff, it is up to them, but pity that poor person, that is often the approach, good cop…bad cop. You reserve the CEO for good things, we have rescued the people, and we have paid the fine…"*

5.6.9.   Summary

In summary, when discussing the organisational drivers that enable effective crisis communication it became evident from the respondents that the characteristics of the CEO had a major influence on enabling effective crisis communication. Several respondents mentioned that the CEO had to be the spokesperson, as the crisis could affect the

organisation's reputational brand. Some of the respondents were of the opinion, however, that the CEO should only to be used for significant crises or to be the face of the organisation in good times. Today's CEO needs to know how social media works and needs to have a visual identity on social media to build up trust relationships. Respondents also mentioned that CEOs need to respond quickly, being open, honest and showing empathy to the victims or the stakeholders. A strong driver to enable effective crisis communication is that most of the respondents mentioned that the CEO needs to take accountability for the crisis, being the face of the organisation.

Respondents also stressed that it was important to build trust relationships, not just with the media in good times but with all stakeholders. Although some respondents highlighted that trust relationships were not to be built during a crisis situation, others said that if the organisation was not known, this could be an opportunity to build relationships with the media and with employees, but cautioned that this had to be very carefully managed. Effort had to be spent to capacitate employees to be ambassadors for the organisation. This was not to avoid responsibility but if responsibility was acknowledged and compensation forthcoming, this could be a good opportunity for an unknown organisation or CEO to build trust relationships. Relationships with credible PR companies could also enable effective crisis communications. PR practitioners specialise in communications and should be used as such during a crisis, to assist and guide the organisation or the CEO.

Stakeholder communication is key to enabling effective crisis communication. When a crisis occurs, communications need to go out to all stakeholders, not just the media. Internal communication to employees is very important to ensure that employees understand what happened and what the restitution actions are.

All respondents stressed that organisations need to have crisis preparedness plans to ensure that possible crises are not only identified but that the organisation knows how to respond once a crisis has occurred. Essential components range from having proper crisis preparedness procedures, policies and process flows, to the spokespersons knowing what protocol to follow. Crisis teams need to be identified – this is not the crisis managers who are expected to manage the direct crisis situation but rather, the team that is expected to manage the overarching crisis situation. The crisis team can include the crisis coordinator, the human resources practitioner, the legal representative, the external and internal

spokespersons, the exco representative and the crisis manager. Respondents stressed that the crisis team needs to know the crisis communication plan and who the stakeholders are in every crisis situation. The stakeholders need to be prioritised as per the crisis, and communication with these different stakeholders needs to be performed as required, ensuring that no stakeholders are left out. Communication could be performed via pre-prepared hymn sheets, which help ensure that no important information is left out. However, the organisation needs to be agile in its response to ensure the narrative and spokespersons are empathetic. Moreover, the legal team needs to have sight of the narrative to ensure that the response could not possibly lead to the organisation being held liable for incorrect statements, as well as to ensure the narrative is not legalistic with no empathy. Respondents also mentioned that the organisation must prepare scenario planning and perform yearly emergency exercises that involve social media mock exercises. These should be used to ensure that the organisation is adequately prepared to manage a crisis and that everybody knows how to perform the recovery following a crisis. Spokespersons gain good experience in responding during such exercises and will then know what to say to the media and the public. The employees and community should also be involved in such exercises. Where it is then established that the spokespersons or CEO do not have sufficient experience, it is essential for them to undergo crisis training bi-annually to ensure they know what to say and what not to say in their responses.

Respondents mentioned that in their experience, most large organisations are very good at risk management – something smaller organisations could learn from them, along with how to identify possible risks and to know what the critical controls are and how best to ensure they do not occur. If these risks do materialise into a crisis situation, then the organisation needs to know how to manage them accordingly to mitigate any damage or consequences. Respondents stated that social media has changed the landscape of crisis communication. Although many organisations see social media as a threat to their organisation, they should learn to use it to their advantage, to ensure that they are proactive at all times during crisis communication. Organisations need to either appoint an external company or have a team that monitors social media on a permanent basis. This is to ensure that any issues can be managed immediately, prior to becoming a crisis. More than 60% of crises are issues that have escalated due to no response or a slow response from the stakeholders.

Respondents further said it was essential to ensure that the reputation of the organisation was managed at all times. One respondent generated a reputation resilience diagram to explain the main factors regarding reputation management. This respondent stated that the reputation resilience factors built the bank of goodwill for an organisation. This, together with the mitigation factors, would ensure effective crisis communication within the organisation. Other respondents added that it was important to have a reputation dashboard, so to consistently monitor the reputation of the organisation. Lastly, respondents highlighted that the culture of the organisation had an important effect on how the reputation was managed during a crisis.

The last theme analysed as mentioned by respondents was the importance of having the correct spokesperson. According to respondents, the spokesperson or CEO must be available immediately. It was thus their recommendation that only one spokesperson be used to ensure consistency in the communication. They did, however, stress the fact that the spokesperson was to be a competent, knowledgeable and experienced spokesperson with a high level of authority. Organisations do not want a situation where the crisis escalates because the spokesperson does not know what they are talking about or needs to revert back to the CEO to answer questions posed by the media. Some respondents felt that although the spokesperson needed to come from inside the business, they did not have to be the CEO, as a PR practitioner could stand as spokesperson, provided they were knowledgeable and informed about the crisis situation.

5.7. Results: Research Question 3b

What Organisational Drivers Prevented Effective Crisis Communication Management?

This section discusses the different organisational drivers that respondents said could possibly prevent effective crisis communication. They highlighted the attitude of the CEO or the spokesperson as the largest driver preventing effective crisis communication within an organisation. If this came across with arrogance, something possibly due to inexperience, it often fuelled the crisis situation. Not all organisations have been through significant crisis situations and therefore do not yet have the relevant experience. As such, they should be open to learning from other organisations.

Respondents mentioned that many CEOs or spokespersons had a fear of reputational damage, which prevented them from effective crisis communication. This fear should not, however, prevent them from building trust relationships with stakeholders and they need to realise thus, that they must undergo proper crisis communication training to enhance their skills when required.

Respondents also highlighted that there are many organisational restraints which prevent CEOs or spokespersons from responding effectively. These restraints should be identified within organisations and resolved as part of the crisis preparedness plans to ensure they do not hamper spokespersons.

Many respondents stressed that social media has changed the communication landscape, and should be used to the organisation's advantage, where CEOs were to be visible and active on social media. They had to know who their stakeholders of interest are and build trust relationships not only with journalists but also with employees and the public.

5.7.1. Negative Attitudes of the CEO or Spokesperson

A negative attitude of the spokesperson, CEO or the organisation would be regarded as preventing effective crisis communication. A few respondents were of the opinion that **_arrogance_** within spokespersons, organisations or CEOs would lead to preventing effective crisis communication. Respondents stated that there are two types of CEOs: those who think they know it all and those who are down to earth; who show empathy and are willing to sit with the stakeholders to discuss the crisis and help resolve the issue.

> Respondent 10: *"Arrogance tends to be a lot more pervasive, we are this big brand, no one can touch us, we are too big to collapse, too big to fail, we will only admit to only what we absolutely have to admit to, other than that, we would not go beyond that."*

> Respondent 11: *"My perspective, there are two types of CEOs. There is the ones who are big cheeses, you know the CEOs who are very important and who sits and believes that if I assist you in a 100 million a year, which is above certain things. And then there are many CEOs in very big companies who are not like that, who are actually available to speak to people, answer stupid questions."*

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Respondents mentioned that *fear* could prevent spokespersons from being effective during crisis communication. If an incident has just occurred and all the facts are not yet known, spokespersons are reluctant to respond for fear of saying things that are incorrect. Some respondents, being reporters, said they found that the spokesperson or CEO was afraid of the media if they did not have a trust relationship with them.

> Respondent 6: *"Fear is a big thing of doing and saying the wrong thing. You have to be confident in communications, you have to be bold. You have to accept that you have made a mistake. Sometimes the fear of admitting errors overtakes the decision-making process."*

> Respondent 7: *"Fear of the media and being reported. A preference to remain below the radar. That is fine a lot of the time. But sometimes it can drive a company not to say anything ever. When you do not say anything, you leave a vacuum, and somebody is going to fill it."*

Respondents also mentioned that the organisation which did not have the ***ability to apologise*** or to take ownership of the crisis prevented them from being effective during their communications. This often leads to another crisis of not being apologetic to the stakeholders.

> Respondent 5: *"The ability to not to say, 'I am sorry' is a huge risk…And if you are not prepared to apologise, what happens is your communication becomes a crisis in itself."*

5.7.2. Inexperience of CEO or Spokesperson

Various respondents mentioned that ***inexperience with crisis communication*** prevented organisations from responding effectively. If the organisation or the CEO did not have the ability to sit down, identify the organisational risks, work out game plans and train their spokesperson in crisis communication, they were inexperienced and would not have the ability to understand crisis management. They stressed that the organisations would set themselves up for failure during crisis communication, which could lead to another crisis unfolding.

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Respondent 4: *"So that inexperience really shifts you if you do not know how to be open and friendly and responsive to journalists and then suddenly you have got people breathing down your neck with cameras."*

Respondent 7: *"A lack of competence and resources in handling crises communication. It is quite specialised. If you have never dealt with it, this is your first time, get someone to help you. Rather than say we can handle it on our own and make a mess of it."*

5.7.3. Indecisive Leaders

Respondents mentioned that if the CEO or exco does not make decisions quickly, the **leaders are indecisive** in their actions, which could lead to slow responses in crisis communication. The intention of effective crisis communication is to have strong leaders who are authentic and who control the crisis communication process.

Respondent 13: *"I think indecisiveness from leadership in a crises situation. Look you will have a crises management team, but I think if your leadership is not able to be decisive... Strong leadership is absolutely important because you can have a very well-rehearsed, skilled crisis management team, know what to do, and the response unit, security and so forth but indecisive leadership, leadership who are not fully engaged on the actual plan itself, that can be a huge hurdle."*

Respondent 14: *"…there is a lack of awareness, of the importance of leaders who act as fast as possible. Because if you do not, you are not going to report…"*

A **lack of competence** could prevent effective crisis communication. Respondents were of the opinion that although professional PR practitioners could be used during crisis communication, the organisation should appoint spokespersons or even the CEO, and that they had to be competent in crisis communication. For this it was essential that all spokespersons receive proper training in media readiness.

Respondent 7: *"A CEO that is so far removed from his staff and he just treats them like school children and feels that they do not need to know what is going on. Stop*

telling them anything. A lack of competence and resources in handling crisis communication."

5.7.4.   The Fear of Reputational Damage

The **fear of reputational damage** is a serious preventer of effective crisis communication to many organisations. The spokespersons or CEOs do not want to respond for fear of saying something wrong. When organisations respond with inexperience, they do not understand the impact that reputational damage could have on their brand. For this reason it is essential that spokespersons and CEOs are trained in what they say in their messages.

> Respondent 3: *"They do not understand the role of communication and reputation, or the impact, the monetary impact of reputation on their business…they were reputationally quite severely impacted."*

> Respondent 9: *"…typically manufacturing, mining firms, they have got great emergency response plans, they have got great risk registers, but it is the reputational risk stuff that they do not understand."*

5.7.5.   Organisational Restraint

Organisational restraint is categorised into several aspects that prevent effective crisis communication. **Lack of resources and competency** in handling crisis communication can hamper an organisation. For that reason, professional consultants are available to ensure the organisation can deliver well prepared and professional messages to the media and to social media.

> Respondent 7: *"A lack of competence and resources in handling crises communication. It is quite specialised. If you have never dealt with it, this is your first time, get someone to help you. Rather than say we can handle it on our own and make a mess of it. There is some companies that never use consultants and that is fine, but when you really need them that is what consultants are for. That is what you pay them for. They come in and help you through it."*

Several respondents mentioned that to **manage by committee** prevents effective crisis communication. The process and time it takes to submit narrative to committees for approval would take too long. It was thus deemed essential that organisations have pre-approved crisis communication templates to ensure that this is not required.

> Respondent 5: *"Clients have tried to build consensus and manage things by committee. Too many people involved…it is a recipe for disaster."*

> Respondent 7: *"Big corporates have got such an approval process that can take too long. I think what companies need is, when they are preparing and putting their crisis plans in place, they need to have something that allows either the spokesperson or somebody to make that decision very quickly."*

Respondents stressed that the **legal department** could prevent effective crisis communication. Most of the respondents were adamant that although the lawyers should be involved, they should not hamper the communication process by wanting the narratives to be very legalistic. The CEO must get guidance from the lawyers during the crisis communication but should know where empathy takes precedence over legal narratives. The opinion from respondents was that maybe you would save a few hundred million on law suits by being legalistic but that reputational damage to the brand could cost you billions.

> Respondent 2: *"Remember the lawyer is not the chief executive of the company, you are. And remember that you are talking to your stakeholders, not just to the lawyers. This is one of the reasons why it is so important, in my opinion, to work all this stuff through beforehand."*

> Respondent 5: *"All communications was run through legal, nothing was issued until legal had approved it…"*

> Respondent 9: *"They take too long, get lawyers involved, the lawyers are important, but the legal approach is, say nothing, say it slowly, you win a court case perhaps, in two years' time, but then there is nothing to win in the end."*

5.7.6. Inability of Using Social Media

Social media today is preventing effective crisis communication, as spokespersons do not know how to manage it. Messages are going out so fast that organisations are not ready and are often caught unawares. Social media has changed the landscape of communication, making it so much faster, and organisations and spokespersons need to adapt accordingly.

> Respondent 1: *"Once again social media has changed that landscape of crisis communication."*

> Respondent 7: *"But that is changed. And social media has made it so much worse, because you are not only dealing with journalists now, you are dealing with anybody who wants to be able to say something."*

> Respondent 8: *"Social media has absolutely changed the way the crisis needs to be managed because of the speed at which one has to respond."*

5.7.7. Failure to Involve Key Stakeholders

Respondents mentioned that although the stakeholders could influence effective crisis communication or even prevent it, it was essential to have the most important stakeholders involved in the crisis communication. Most respondents further noted that the organisation's employees are the most important stakeholders and should be involved in the process. The employees should be ambassadors for the organisation, not critics on what the organisation is saying on social media. Thus, they should be involved during crisis communication.

> Respondent 2: *"…to think about likely possibilities, and to do it in a relatively formal way and also to involve not just the scenario planning team, but to involve key members across the organisation."*

> Respondent 7: *"But there was all this other noise going on. And they did not do anything to tell the employees. I told them the employees need to know what the story was. I said they can be your ambassadors."*

5.7.8. Summary

In summary, the respondents stated that the attitude which the spokesperson or CEO takes during response could prevent effective crisis communication. CEOs should not be arrogant in their approach but have an attitude of caring and empathy towards stakeholders. Fear could also prevent effective crisis communication and spokespersons should build that trust relationship with journalists and undergo training where required. Leader indecisiveness definitely prevents effective crisis communication, and CEOs and executives should have sufficient experience and knowledge that they can make decisions as quickly as possible. In doing this, leaders should appoint competent spokespersons to gather information speedily and perform their crisis communication effectively.

The fear of reputational damage will also prevent effective crisis communication. Thus, organisations should properly prepare their CEOs and spokespersons in media communication, ensuring that they know what to say and what not to say when a crisis has occurred. Organisations should be aware of drivers within the organisation that prevent effective crisis communication. The legal department must be involved in reviewing the media releases but only to the point where empathy is not taken away in the messages to be sent to stakeholders. Moreover, the legal department needs to ensure that the message is such that the organisation cannot be held liable for incorrect statements.

Respondents were of the opinion that the inability of using social media correctly has changed the landscape and prevents organisations from communicating effectively. This is only until they understand social media and how to utilise social media to their advantage, such that they are able to be proactive and control the communications on media.

Lastly, the failure to involve stakeholders could prevent effective crisis communications but organisations need to understand that the trust relationships with their stakeholders should be built long before a crisis occurs. Employees are to be seen as ambassadors for the organisation and not as a threat when crises occur. Also, journalists are critical in the trust relationship and CEOs need to be open to conducting media interviews during the good times of the business.

5.8. Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings from the discussions which were held with the respondents regarding crisis situations that organisations experienced and how they were managed by organisations and CEOs. The findings indicated that organisations and spokespersons are not following the positive responses and are more prone to negative responses during their communications. From the study it was evident that most respondents were of the opinion that if positive strategies were followed, the crises would not have escalated and could have been managed proactively and controlled before the crises escalated. Organisations are experiencing more crises today but are still not learning from the mistakes made by other companies.

For effective crisis communication, respondents mentioned that spokespersons should have a response out within the first hour, even if not all the facts are at hand. From there, the responses need to stay active to ensure a vacuum is not left, which could be filled by the public or victims. The spokesperson needs to be prepared and have a proactive engagement strategy once the crisis occurs to be able to control the narrative during the crisis communication process. Social media should be used as a tool by spokespersons to ensure that they are proactive in their crisis communication. Respondents also mentioned that the CEO needs to be involved in most communications concerning a crisis. With social media today, the risk of damaging reputation is so high, the CEO should get involved, not just with severe incidents involving deaths or reputational damage to the brand, but with any crisis situation. Findings also showed that it is important for spokespersons to build trust relationships upfront with the public and stakeholders, by ensuring that they are open, honest and transparent at all times during their communications with the media and the public. Spokespersons need to show rapport in their responses, not formal or cold statements. This is where the restoration process starts between the stakeholders and the organisation. The organisation needs to implement corrective measures to ensure that what happened does not happen again, as well as assist victims to deal with the consequences. Restitution is then started by expressing sympathy to the victims or stakeholders. Compensation could take whatever form is important for the victims, showing them paramount interest from the organisation's side. Part of the restitution that the victims or their families require is for the organisation to admit that they have learnt from this crisis and have affected actions to ensure this will not happen again in the future. The findings furthermore showed that disclosure from the organisation is required by the victims and

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their families. The organisation needs to disclose what the root cause of the incident was and the actions being put in place to prevent it from reoccurring. All the stakeholders require closure to move on in life.

The findings from the study also showed that behaviours characterising ineffective crisis communication involved attempting to build trust relationships during a crisis situation and not being absent when the crisis had occurred. The study showed that negative responses were also ineffective. These ranged from being slow to respond after the crisis had occurred and being unprepared in the response message, to not having empathy during the response. Respondents stated that if trust relationships were built with journalists, under no circumstances should their deadlines be missed, as this would result in journalists not trusting the spokesperson or the CEO. Findings also showed that traditional communication was ineffective. Organisations that responded in old-fashioned ways had to learn from other, more modern organisations how to respond on social media and stay in control of communications. The viewpoints were mixed regarding having the legal team involved in crisis communication. Where the response following a crisis was legalistic, this was very ineffective. The respondents were of the viewpoint that the legal team had to be involved to review the narratives, so to ensure the organisation could not be held liable with incorrect statements made by the spokesperson or the CEO. Finally, respondents emphasised that poor CEO attitude and response was very ineffective. CEOs had to ensure that they were properly trained for a crisis communication response and had a visual identity on social media.

Regarding the findings that enabled effective crisis communication, PR practitioners mentioned that the characteristics of the CEO had a major influence on this. Several respondents mentioned that the CEO had to be the spokesperson, as the crisis could affect the organisation's reputational brand. It was advised that the CEO has a visual identity on social media in order to have an active presence but ultimately, the CEO must take accountability for the crisis. PR practitioners stressed that the spokesperson had to build trust relationships not just during a crisis but prior to crises taking place. These trust relationships involved not only journalists but also capacitating employees to be knowledgeable of the organisation's situation. PR practitioners said that to build trust relationships required good stakeholder communication. All respondents stressed that organisations need to have crisis preparedness plans to ensure that possible crises are not

only identified in risk registers but that the organisations know how to respond once a crisis has occurred. Essential components ranged from having proper crisis preparedness procedures, policies and process flows, to spokespersons knowing what protocol to follow. PR practitioners added that social media has changed the landscape of crisis communication. Although many organisations see social media as a threat to their organisation, this study showed they should learn to use social media to their advantage, to ensure that they are proactive at all times during crisis communication. PR practitioners also said that it was essential to ensure that the reputation of the organisation was managed at all times. A reputation resilience diagram was generated to explain the main factors regarding reputation management. These factors built the bank of goodwill for an organisation which, together with the mitigation factors, would ensure effective crisis communication within the organisation. The last theme analysed in this discussion with PR practitioners mentioned the importance of having the correct spokesperson. Respondents stated that the spokesperson or CEO must be available immediately and recommended that only one spokesperson be used, if possible, to ensure consistency in the communication. They stressed, however, that the spokesperson was to be a competent, knowledgeable and experienced spokesperson with a high level of authority.

Finally, the findings regarding organisational drivers that prevent effective crisis communication showed that the attitude which the spokesperson or CEO takes during crisis response could prevent effective crisis communication. If CEOs were fearful due to lack of experience, this could result in them being arrogant during response situations. CEOs should have an attitude of caring and empathy towards stakeholders. Indeed, PR practitioners said that the organisation should have a strategy to apologise, take control and move forward, adding that organisations should not be held back by policies and procedures or lack thereof. All legal requirements and protocols should be hashed out beforehand so that they do not prevent communication from taking place. PR practitioners were also of the opinion that the effect of social media, which has drastically changed the landscape, does prevent organisations from communicating effectively if they do not understand these platforms and how to utilise them to their advantage. Lastly, stakeholders could prevent effective crisis communications but organisations need to understand that the trust relationships with their stakeholders, which include employees and journalists, need to be built long before a crisis occurs.

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CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1. Introduction

The purpose of this research was to understand why there are gaps or anomalies between what the literature recommends companies should do in effective crisis communication and what companies appear to be doing in practice. Chapter Five presented the detailed results regarding what PR and communications practitioners consider effective and ineffective crisis communication. Rich themes were extracted from the quotations of what PR and communications practitioners regard as organisational drivers that enable and prevent effective crisis communication. This chapter discusses the results of the study which were presented in Chapter Five. The research questions in Chapter Three will be connected to the findings and compared to the literature research from Chapter Two.

6.2. Discussion of Research Question 1

What Characteristics of Crises Influence Effective Crisis Communication?

The question was analysed in three parts: origin of crises, crisis descriptor type, and crisis intensity. Each will be discussed in turn.

6.2.1. Origin of Crises

In support of Coombs (2015), several PR practitioners mentioned from the results of the study that there is a differentiation between issues and crises in an organisation. The PR practitioners said that issue management is important and that in their experience, organisations were not managing issues timeously, resulting in these issues escalating into crises. Grebe (2013b) stated that if a crisis situation was managed poorly, it could result in a "double crisis" situation, where the lack of effective response leads to another crisis, resulting in further reputational damage to the organisation. This was found by most PR practitioners who discussed crisis situations, as the organisations managed the situations very ineffectively, which ultimately led to double crisis situations.

In Chapter Five, the response from the PR practitioners supports what was said by Jin et al. (2014), as most of the crises in which the practitioners were involved resulted from issues within the organisation. If the risks were identified in risk registers as issues, the crises

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probably could have been prevented. PR practitioners also mentioned that organisations should focus on the issues within their company and resolve them before they escalate into crises. PR practitioners supported Kim (2013) and emphasised that it is important to establish from where the crisis originated – internally within the organisation or externally to the organisation.

6.2.2. Crisis Descriptor Type

From the results in Chapter Five, 21 of the 26 crises that were discussed by PR practitioners were categorised by the researcher as "accidents" and are supported by several academics as shown in Table 1. Kim (2013) said that the public will be more lenient towards an accident crisis which occurred unintentionally than a transgression crisis which was performed with intention. From the results in Appendix K it can be seen that the organisations did not respond well to these crises, which mostly resulted in major crisis situations following the original crisis. It is possible that if the organisations had reacted with positive responses (Figure 3), the crises could have been mitigated and subdued. Utz et al. (2013) noted that in the case of intentional crises, the public would respond more negatively towards the organisation and do so on social media. This was noted in the unintentional crises that occurred because the organisations did not respond in time, which led to a negative impact on social media. The findings support Seeger (2006), who said it is important to distinguish between the crisis types when an incident crisis occurs, as this then determines the requirements for effective crisis communication.

6.2.3. Crisis Intensity

In interviewing the PR practitioners, the study supported Kim (2013) in that the threat levels of the crises were mostly high and the organisations did not take time to respond properly. In the examples given, the organisations were not ready with their crisis communication response plans. Only after the PR practitioners got involved in the crises did the situations improve. Most PR practitioners mentioned that the organisations or CEOs could have controlled the response plans much better, to avoid a double crisis taking place.

6.2.4. Summary of Discussion of Research Question 1

In conclusion it was seen from the results in section 5.3 that, according to the literature, organisations should be identifying the crisis origins, the types of crises and the intensity

thereof. From the interviews performed, it is clear organisations in practice are not following these guidelines. Practice has shown there is a possible relationship between the crisis type and crisis intensity and how organisations are responding in practice. Organisations are not responding properly, leading to double crises, as mentioned in the literature. While this has not been investigated further in this study, it will be noted for future research.

6.3. Discussion of Research Question 2

What Behaviours Characterise Effective and Ineffective Crisis Communication Management?

From the discussions it was clear that PR practitioners needed to understand the reputational impact if crisis communication was not achieved effectively. Table 3 from section 2.8 has been summarised below in Table 6, with a summary of the best practices from literature in effective crisis communication as mentioned by various academics.

Table 6

Summarised best practices from literature

Academic Best Practices in Effective Crisis Communication	Summarised Best Practices from Literature
Designate crisis spokespersons	Correct spokesperson
Establish risk and crisis management policies and process approaches	Crisis communication plan
Pre-event planning	
Identify formal channels and methods of communication	
Partnerships with the public	Stakeholder engagement
Listen to the public's concerns and understand the audience	
Meet the needs of the media and remain accessible	Good media communications
Accept uncertainty and ambiguity	
Honesty, candour, and openness	Honesty
Collaborate and coordinate with credible sources	Credibility and trust
Communicate with compassion, concern, and empathy	Rapport
Messages of self-efficacy	Resolution

Although having the correct spokesperson and crisis communication plan is mentioned by academics as best practices, these are enabling factors for effective crisis communication.

These principles were discussed as part of the interviews as related to sections 5.4 and 5.5 respectively to establish the behaviours that characterise effective and ineffective crisis communication. It is important to first review what PR practitioners regarded as important strategies to follow, before the questions are analysed.

6.3.1. Strategies to be Followed

From the findings in the study in Chapter Five it was clear that most organisations followed negative strategies, primarily being absent from communications, as well as being very legalistic. Discussions around being defensive were not as prominent in the responses. Organisations and CEOs are knowingly or unknowingly following strategies of absence very prominently in the crises discussed. Etter et al. (2017) stated that, depending on the communication strategy followed by the organisation and the form of engagement taken for the specific crisis type, this can lead to emotional responses by the affected stakeholders.

From the findings PR practitioners mentioned that to assume responsibility was the most important strategy to follow, together with building trust relationships. An accommodative strategy came out as the third-highest priority in the analysis. This is in support of what Utz et al. (2013) stated, that having an accommodative strategy is conducive to effective crisis communication.

From the findings PR practitioners mentioned that organisations should be accommodative and consider compensating the victims or their families. This is not a "cover-up" compensation on social media to make the crisis go away but rather, a strategy to show the victims or their families that the organisation is remorseful and cares about them. The findings have not, however, supported this statement of academics as no recommendations for sympathetic approaches were found, and only one PR respondent mentioned that an organisation was unsympathetic.

Contributing to Veil et al. (2011), PR practitioners said that assuming responsibility is the most important strategy. In the researcher's opinion, based on the discussions from the interviews, organisations should be following strategies where they firstly acknowledge that

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a crisis has occurred. This indicates to the stakeholders that the organisation is taking control of the incident and demonstrates empathy to the victims and the public. Following on this strategy, organisations should then consider publicly assuming responsibility for their crisis, as this will demonstrate accountability to their stakeholders and start the restitution process. Trust relationships, named as the second-most important strategy, should be an overall strategy of organisations – not only in times of crisis but in good times too, as relationships should be continuously built upon. A healthy trust relationship with stakeholders shows favour to the organisation and ensures that reputational damage does not occur, or at least minimises any that does.

The question was respectively analysed in two parts, namely what behaviours characterise effective and ineffective crisis communication.

6.3.2. What Behaviours Characterise Effective Crisis Communication?

The findings from the study show that trust and credibility are important for effective crisis communication, supporting what Reynolds and Seeger (2014) stated in their CERC model. According to the PR practitioners, the reason why organisations take long to respond is to verify facts prior to communication. They mentioned a process to ensure that the proper facts are gained from crisis managers or other subject matter experts from the organisation. It is essential to ensure that credibility is established for the press release. Indeed, PR practitioners emphasised that factual information and speedy response, combined with trust, were hugely important.

From the results obtained, it was found in the examples discussed with PR practitioners that even although most organisations had policies and procedures in place, they were still not responding fast enough, contradicting what Reynolds and Seeger (2014) stated. Depending on the crisis at stake and the approval processes required, spokespersons could get approval for a response, sometimes in days. This indicated that some spokespersons or organisations could get responses out very quickly, depending on the severity of the crisis and if the facts known at that stage could be communicated. Based on the context of the crisis, most PR practitioners were adamant that a quick response should be, in today's time of social media, within the first hour. Munnukka and Järvi (2014) stated that due to the uncertainty and perceived risks in using social media, many organisations were limiting the use thereof. Meanwhile, PR practitioners mentioned that organisations are not yet

recognising that social media has a large influence on crisis communications these days. The results further found that the most important aspect of crisis communication in practice was to respond quickly following a crisis. This enabled the organisation to take control of the situation and follow the other factors of effective crisis communication.

Public empathy was emphasised during the interviews by the PR practitioners, who were very passionate about the fact that empathy was probably the most important factor in effective crisis communication. Organisations had to show they were deeply sorry by removing the victims from the crisis communication. PR practitioners also highlighted that once an incident had occurred, you could not just leave it there. They supported what Reynolds and Seeger (2014) stated that organisations had to engage with the families even if they did not agree with what happened during the incident. This does not mean that the organisation was taking liability for the crisis but simply that it was showing empathy to the victim's families.

PR practitioners supported Floreddu and Cabiddu (2016) by mentioning that if an organisation was perceived to be hiding or deleting posts following a crisis, this would cause uncertainty and a breakdown in trust with the public. By creating organisational crisis communication plans and defining the transparency strategies to be followed during crisis communication, it would assist PR practitioners and spokespersons to follow correct procedures to ensure the responses were always transparent on social media as supported by Rokka et al. (2013). Various PR practitioners emphasised repeatedly that being open and transparent is the key to effective communications and ensures that confidence is gained with the public. Indeed, most PR practitioners iterated that spokespersons need "to be open and transparent". Examples were quoted that once the organisation openly communicated, the situation changed on social media. PR practitioners did mention that where the organisations were open in their crisis communication, this caused the situation to change on social media. PR practitioners also advised that following the crisis situation, organisations should hold a press conference to afford journalists the opportunity to ask questions. This was important in having transparency and building relationships to ensure that confidence was built with the media and stakeholders.

Complementing Reynolds and Seeger (2014), the findings from Chapter Five showed that the most important aspect of effective crisis communication was to initiate active response.

Indeed, PR practitioners were quite clear that the process did not stop after the initial response. It was thus essential that the rapid response way of communication was continued by ensuring that the spokesperson or organisation kept on actively responding with the stakeholders and public, as they needed to know what the organisation was doing in response to the situation. In this regard, different forms of media could be used to ensure active response takes place. Contributing to literature is the fact that spokespersons needed to be agile in their response, because this meant they were able to adjust their communication quickly to suit the crisis situation as it evolved. PR practitioners mentioned that where organisations were not agile in their policies and procedures, the responses were ineffective and in some cases led to "double crises".

The findings showed honesty as being critical during crisis communications. This corresponded with what Xu and Wu (2017) said, that communicating information with honesty and openness was important. As openness and transparency was important, the PR practitioners iterated that honesty was as important, especially in what was said as a spokesperson. Honesty builds the trust relationship mentioned earlier, which results in journalists trusting spokespersons from organisations when they are in a dilemma and need time to gain facts before a full media release can be shared. PR practitioners needed to build honest relationships with journalists, such that the media could trust them if they did not have all the information initially, knowing that they could contact them later for additional input and comment.

From the study, PR practitioners accentuated that organisations needed to be sympathetic in the press release but must also show remorse by acknowledging and compensating the victims. PR practitioners agreed with Grebe (2013a) that an insincere apology or conveying false information can fuel an emotional situation caused by the crisis, leading to the stakeholders becoming angry as they might feel the organisation is being dishonest or not taking up its responsibilities. PR practitioners mentioned that if you were sincere in your communications, you could not use the word "but" after the acknowledging phrase. The best reflection of true sympathy was where the CEO got involved in the crisis situation; provided the CEO's intention was not to build reputational brand but rather, to show that he or she truly cared for their employees or victims.

Contributing to literature, PR practitioners said that organisations could not initiate an initial response following a crisis, show rapport and then stop all communications. The process

had to continue once empathy or rapport had been shown to the victims or the stakeholders. Regret that the crisis had occurred was essential to continue the process of restoration. In most examples given by PR practitioners, organisations had stopped after they showed rapport, which led to victims or the public not always having closure. If the organisation showed regret, this indicated to victims that the organisation was sorry the incident had occurred and demonstrated its willingness to start the next phase of resolution.

In this resolution phase, the organisation had to show that they were in control of the situation and were putting measures in place so that such an incident could never happen again. Categorised by Reynolds and Seeger (2014) in the initial phase of crisis communication as shown in Appendix A, this phase is characterised by confusion due to lack of information and media interest, as the crisis had just occurred. Supporting Grebe (2013b), PR practitioners mentioned that the spokesperson must control the crisis and the narrative. If the narrative was not controlled, the spokesperson would immediately be reactive to the public, resulting in the media and public leading the comments and statements made. PR practitioners stated that when a crisis occurred, the public were desperate for information, so other people would come forward and talk on social media if a vacuum was left by the organisation. If the organisation did not control the messaging during the early stages and attempted to control the narrative later, it would seem as if the organisation was trying to justify itself for the crisis that occurred. Spokespersons thus had to be proactive and not be caught unawares during the communication process. PR practitioners also noted that victims and stakeholders are generally forgiving if the organisation indicated regret and resolution. However, if organisations did not indicate these two important aspects, these would primarily be the factors that lead to reputational damage.

The problem is that PR practitioners and attorneys do not always agree on the best approach to follow, resulting in attorneys being over legalistic in their proposed communications and opting for "no comment" communication, as mentioned by Grebe (2013a). The findings from this study showed that PR practitioners differed in opinion with regards to what it meant to take responsibility at the outset of the crisis communication. Some PR practitioners said this is the start of the restoration process. PR practitioners also stressed that times are changing, especially in South Africa, where the public is holding CEOs accountable for their actions. PR practitioners furthermore said that it was less of a

financial impact for an organisation to take accountability for the crisis and carry the financial loss than for the exponential financial loss that could be caused by reputational damage as a result of denial of responsibility. This could financially affect the company for years to follow. Some PR practitioners believe that organisations should not take responsibility due to the legal liability risk. Time should be given to the legal department to enable their legal narrative to be corrected, to ensure the liability to the company is minimal. PR practitioners from large corporate organisations affirmed that their policies dictate to them to first obtain legal approvals prior to any communications regarding severe crises.

Extending literature, the PR practitioners mentioned that restitution was important as part of effective crisis communication. Restitution started by expressing sympathy for the victims, their families or the affected stakeholders. Once the stakeholders are convinced that this is honest caring, the organisation could start a process of giving back to the victims. Restitution was mostly important for victims and their families, but also not excluding other stakeholders such as shareholders. Restitution could include replacing vehicles where vehicle defects were the cause of the crisis or implementing appropriate compensation as required. This does not resolve the victims' claims from liability, for instance, in the case of deaths as a result of the crisis but does ensure that the organisation regains favour from the victims or from the public. To build on restitution, organisations must not only learn from their mistakes but also ensure that before responses begin on social media, they know who their audience is so that the correct communication can be disseminated. Organisations need to learn from incidents, discussing what other organisations have experienced, what they have and have not done well, and putting actions in place to ensure that such an event does not happen to them. PR practitioners also said that organisations cannot use the excuse that they did not know – not in today's world.

From the study, PR practitioners agreed with Austin et al., (2012) that a crisis can be dynamic. PR practitioners said that organisations had to be agile during communications and ensure that they avoid rationalism when they respond. During a crisis, victims and stakeholders are very sensitive to what is said. Although sometimes it could be easier to be rational, special care had to be taken in ensuring the media narrative was correct and that rationalism was avoided.

During restoration, it takes a long time for stakeholders to rebuild trust in the organisation. From the findings, PR practitioners said it was essential for organisations to ensure that once they had completed their internal investigations as to the root cause of the incident, they communicated this to all stakeholders. Victims and the public want closure on the crisis, and organisations need to be open and transparent about the cause of the crisis. Most organisations were not following through on this important aspect, however, as they were concerned about legal liability. PR practitioners supported Reynolds and Seeger (2014) in mentioning that as social media was forcing companies to be more open and transparent, companies should be in a position to communicate the cause. PR practitioners also advised organisations to rather communicate the cause than have it come out another way and cause greater reputational damage.

The findings from the study supported Veil et al. (2011), as it emerged that the spokesperson is an important enabler to effective crisis communication. The most prominent theme that emerged was that the spokesperson had to be available immediately. PR practitioners mentioned that someone has to get up and correspond with the stakeholders as quickly as possible after a crisis has occurred. This person has to be dedicated in actively responding on frequent occasions, as the situation cannot arise where a vacuum is created due to lack of response. PR practitioners also said that once the crisis communication starts, it is essential to have only one spokesperson who communicates to the stakeholders but noted that this person must have a high level of authority. This was to ensure that the same message was conveyed to all the stakeholders and that damage could not be done by spokespersons giving contradicting messages.

In conclusion, Reynolds and Seeger (2014) and Xu and Wu (2017) showed behaviours characterising effective crisis communication, compared to what PR practitioners said. Table 7 below lists the difference in the behaviours between literature and practice.

Table 7

Summary of behaviours characterising effective crisis communication

	LITERATURE	PRACTICE
1	Empathy and caring	Empathy and compassion
2	Competence and expertise	Correct spokesperson

3	Honesty and openness	Honesty, open and transparent
4	Committed to resolving crisis	Resolution
5	Taking accountability	Responsibility
6	Credibility	Accuracy of Information
7	-	Rapid response
8	-	Active response
9	-	Rapport
10	-	Regret
11	-	Restitution
12	-	Avoiding rationalism
13	-	Disclosure

6.3.3. What Behaviours Characterise Ineffective Crisis Communication?

The findings from this study confirm what Coombs and Holladay (2010) said about being absent in communications following a crisis. PR practitioners were adamant that when the organisation did not respond following a crisis and were absent in their communications, that this caused damage to their brand value. This absence in communication also caused a vacuum on social media, resulting in the victims or journalists filling this gap with their own perceptions.

From the findings, the discussions with the PR practitioners were consistent with Grebe (2013a) that PR practitioners and attorneys do not always agree on the best approach to follow. The findings presented in section 5.5 showed that some PR practitioners were of the opinion that you do not get the lawyers involved, as they delay the response process, which results in the stakeholders wondering what is happening and why the lawyers are responding, or why the narrative is very legalistic. PR practitioners were of the opinion that if you get lawyers involved, they are only interested in winning a case. However, they did say that the legal team needs to be part of the crisis team but that overall, the CEO must take accountability and ensure that the narrative is empathetic. The other opinion of PR practitioners was that the response needed to be approved by the legal entity to ensure that whatever was said, the organisation could not be held liable in court cases. This was further supported by Coombs (2007). In addition, it was mostly found by PR practitioners

representing large corporates that they would wait for the legal responses before they were allowed to communicate.

The findings from this study supported Grebe (2013b) in that PR practitioners felt that if the spokespersons did not control the narrative from the start, they were taking a defensive strategy, which was very ineffective for their communications. Spokespersons needed to adopt a proactive engagement strategy from the initial response of the crisis, as this would ensure that the organisation was proactive in its handling of matters. PR practitioners further said that it was important to lead the narrative and be in control, adding that if organisations were not proactive and confident in responding, then it would seem to the public that they were coming in afterwards in an attempt to do damage control. In addition, the spokesperson needed to be sure of the narrative so that the message came across with confidence, leading the narrative. If the organisation was seen to be leading the narrative, it immediately emphasised their acknowledgement that an incident had occurred but that they were in control of the outcome. Once an organisation was in responsive mode, it was defensive in all its communications.

Literature has suggested that it is essential to convey credible information that has been reality checked and not disseminate information that has mixed and conflicting messages (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). Reynolds and Seeger (2014) further stated that critical information should not be released late or that commitments be overpromised, unverified or unable to be delivered. From this study PR practitioners mentioned that missing deadlines was very ineffective – not just with regards to the crisis communication situation but also in destroying trust relationships with journalists and stakeholders. If a journalist had requested information and been polite enough to wait for a response so they could meet their deadline, then the relationship needs to be respected. Journalists have a task of submitting cutting-edge information within certain time frames. Given today's social media trends, journalists have to post immediately or risk losing the opportunity to communicate news headlines. PR practitioners also mentioned that when spokespersons or organisations were not being authentic, it was very ineffective. This could include not sharing factual information, being secretive or withholding information. As soon as the media or public noticed that an organisation was not authentic, the trust relationship was broken and would be very difficult and time consuming to rebuild.

PR practitioners contributed to literature that it is was very ineffective to attempt to build a relationship with either the media or the public during crisis situations. The main focus during crisis communication was to be apologetic and empathetic and not to be seen to be building the organisation's brand or relationships. PR practitioners also stressed that in today's time of social media communications it was essential for organisations to respond quickly when a crisis occurred and also to be prepared in their crisis communication. It is ineffective for a spokesperson to be too slow in responding or to not respond at all. Moreover, no response or a slow response can create a vacuum, which would be filled by the public or other commentators. In addition, the PR practitioners said that the spokesperson had to be a person of authority who knew what was happening and had sufficient information at hand to be prepared to answer the questions posed by the media and the public. They added that the media or public do not want to correspond with a person who has to refer questions back to senior authorities.

The findings from this study also revealed that PR practitioners said that although companies are starting to realise they need to respond more effectively, many companies still have a tendency to want to respond the old-fashioned way, by preparing a media release and wanting to send it out only when they are ready. Organisations have to realise that social media does not wait for an organisation to respond, no matter who they are. When a crisis breaks out, the public responds immediately on social media. Organisations must thus look at updating their systems and procedures to keep up with social media.

Finally, adding to literature, PR practitioners were very vocal regarding how CEOs responded during a crisis. Various PR practitioners voiced their opinion about how ineffective CEOs could be during their crisis communication. This ranged from CEOs regarding themselves as too important to discuss the crisis with the PR practitioners; to where CEOs waited or hoped, as it may, for the situation to pass; to where CEOs simply had a bad attitude in their response and were disrespectful to the media. The PR practitioners were adamant that the CEO is the external face of the organisation and that the buck stops there. If the CEO was not effective or said things he or she should not have, it could permanently damage the reputation of the organisation. PR practitioners mentioned that should the CEOs did not have a visual identity, their crisis communication would be ineffective. This should ideally be in place before a crisis occurs but during a crisis the CEO

should be seen and not only heard, otherwise the perception is created that the CEO is hiding away from responsibility.

6.3.4. Summary of Discussion on Research Question 2

Connecting the findings from this study to literature, it can be seen that although effective crisis communication is primarily regarded by academics as building credibility and trust through the crisis response, practice is complementing literature with ensuring that spokespersons respond actively and with honesty and rapport. Organisations are required to gain resolution during their communications with their stakeholders by taking responsibility for the crisis, yet avoiding rationalism during their crisis narrative. Finally, PR practitioners said it was important for organisations to disclose to their stakeholders the outcome and cause of crisis incidents, as this enabled stakeholders to get closure, as well as assist with rebuilding the organisation's reputation.

This research contributes to literature by recommending that organisations show regret in their initial communications to stakeholders. It is not sufficient to only show empathy and compassion, victims especially would want organisations to acknowledge they are truly sorry for what happened. Organisations are also required to express sympathy with victims or their families following an incident, and must face the fact that they need to adopt a restitution approach with their stakeholders to start the process of closure. Organisations should not be self-focused and worry solely about legal liabilities, as reputational damage has a far greater financial impact on the organisation than legal liability.

6.4. Discussion of Research Question 3

When the Company Communicated During a Crisis, What is Regarded as Enablers and Preventers in Organisational Behaviour for Effective Crisis Communication?

The question was analysed in two parts.

6.4.1. What Organisational Drivers Enable Effective Crisis Communication Management?

The findings from this study supported Reynolds and Seeger (2014), as PR practitioners stressed that organisations needed to have crisis preparedness plans in place. This was

essential for organisations to ensure that possible crises are not only identified but that the organisation knows how to respond once a crisis has occurred. Essential components range from having proper crisis preparedness procedures, policies and process flows, to the spokespersons knowing what protocol to follow. Crisis teams need to be identified, ranging from having the crisis coordinator, the human resources practitioner, the legal representative, the external and internal spokespersons, the exco representative and the crisis manager. Respondents stressed the fact that the crisis team needs to know the crisis communication plan and who the stakeholders are in every crisis situation. The stakeholders need to be prioritised as per the crisis and communications with the different stakeholders need to be performed as required, ensuring no stakeholders are left out. Communication could be performed via pre-prepared hymn sheets (as one respondent called them), which help ensure that no important information is left out. However, the organisation needs to be agile in the response to ensure that the narrative and spokespersons are empathetic. The PR practitioners also mentioned that organisations had to prepare scenario planning and perform yearly emergency exercises, which should involve social media mock exercises. These exercises are not only to ensure the organisation is prepared to manage a crisis and know how to perform the recovery following the crisis, but that the spokespersons gain experience in responding and know what to say to the media and the public. Where it is then established that the spokespersons or CEO do not have sufficient experience, it is essential for them to undergo crisis training bi-annually to ensure they know what to say and what not to say.

Acknowledging Veil et al. (2011), PR practitioners mentioned that organisations had to perform good media communications, which not only involved verifying the facts but also having a proactive engagement strategy. PR practitioners iterated that if issues are not dealt with timeously, they would evolve into crises. They explained that in an organisation, issues would develop long before a crisis exploded in the public. It was thus deemed essential for organisations to take a proactive strategy and manage these issues before they become crises. If issues are dealt with upfront, organisations are far more proactive and have greater credibility and can build their reputation accordingly. PR practitioners also supported what Veil et al. (2011) suggested in that organisations need to ensure they have sufficient social media monitoring platforms in place.

The findings were consistent with Veil et al. (2011) regarding having the correct spokespersons. PR practitioners said that the spokesperson or CEO must be available immediately and recommended that ideally, only one spokesperson was to be used to ensure consistency in the communication. They did, however, stress the fact that the spokesperson was to be a competent, knowledgeable and experienced spokesperson with a high level of authority as mentioned by Reynolds and Seeger (2014). Organisations do not want a situation where the crisis escalates because the spokesperson does not know what they are talking about or needs to revert back to the CEO to answer questions posed by the media. Some respondents did feel that although the spokesperson needed to come from inside the business, they need not be the CEO, as it would be sufficient to use a PR practitioner as the spokesperson, provided this person was knowledgeable and up to speed with the crisis situation.

Contributing to literature, PR practitioners emphasised that the characteristics of the CEO had a major influence on enabling effective crisis communication. Several PR practitioners mentioned that the CEO had to be the spokesperson, as the crisis could affect the organisation's reputational brand. Some of the PR practitioners were of the opinion, however, that the CEO is only to be used for significant crises or to be the face of the organisation in good times. Today's CEO needs to know how social media works and needs to have a visual identity on social media to build up trust relationships. PR practitioners also mentioned that CEOs need to respond quickly, being open, honest and showing empathy to the victims or the stakeholders. A strong driver to enable effective crisis communication is that most of the respondents agreed that the CEO needs to take accountability for the crisis, being the face of the organisation.

The findings presented in section 5.6 supported Floreddu and Cabiddu (2016) in stating that it was important to build a conversational platform, not just with the media in good times but with all the stakeholders. Although some respondents highlighted that trust relationships were not to be built during a crisis situation, others said that if the organisation was not known, this could be an opportunity to build relationships with the media and with employees, but noted that it had to be managed very carefully. Effort had to be made to capacitate employees to be ambassadors for the organisation. This was not to be seen as avoiding responsibility but if responsibility was acknowledged and compensation forthcoming, this could be a good opportunity for an unknown organisation or CEO to build

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trust relationships. Relationships with credible PR companies could also enable effective crisis communications, as PR practitioners specialise in communications and should be used as such during a crisis, to assist and guide the organisation or CEO.

The findings from this study support Coombs (2015) in that risk management is an important organisational behaviour enabling effective crisis communication. The organisation needs to know the possible risks to the organisation by compiling a risk register. PR practitioners said it was essential to understand what the likelihood is of a crisis occurring, what the impact could be and how the organisation would respond to mitigate the crisis. Most organisations think this is enough and stop here with the process. Once the crises have been identified, possible warning signs or flag raisers should be discussed and then implemented to ensure the organisation is warned timeously before a crisis occurs. PR practitioners mentioned that in their experience, most large organisations are very good at risk management. Smaller organisations should learn from them by identifying possible risks that could occur and knowing what the critical controls are to ensure they do not occur. If these risks do materialise into a crisis situation, then the organisation needs to know how to manage them accordingly to mitigate the damage or consequences.

The findings from this study support Utz et al. (2013) in that it was essential to ensure the reputation of the organisation was managed at all times. One respondent generated a reputation resilience diagram to explain the main factors regarding reputation management. This respondent mentioned that the reputation resilience factors built the bank of goodwill for an organisation. This, together with the mitigation factors, ensures effective crisis communication within the organisation. PR practitioners supported Dijkmans et al. (2015) in noting that online reputation management requires organisations to understand the different forms of engagement and emotions from stakeholders, to ensure that proper platforms for dialogue and interaction are created. PR practitioners supported Etter et al. (2017) in that it was important to have a reputation dashboard to consistently monitor the reputation of the organisation on social media. Others mentioned it was important to have a head of communications or chief reputation officer who is represented on the board and who reports directly to the CEO. Lastly, respondents highlighted that the culture of the organisation had an important effect on how the reputation was managed during a crisis.

6.4.2. What Organisational Drivers Prevent Effective Crisis Communication?

Findings presented in section 5.7 affirmed what Wendling et al. (2013) said regarding drivers that prevent ineffective crisis communication. PR practitioners mentioned that organisations should be aware of drivers within the organisation that prevent effective crisis communication. Organisational restraint was regarded as an important behaviour. This entailed having crisis communication plans in place to ensure that it was not required to manage a crisis by committees. This was regarded by PR practitioners as very ineffective and slowed responses down significantly. Organisations had to ensure that all their policies, procedures and response plans were in place and exercises performed yearly.

Contributing to literature, PR practitioners mentioned that lack of resources and competence also prevented effective communication. Sufficient resources were to be made available for crisis management and elevated in the organisation to the point where these resources reported directly to the CEO or exco. Inexperience was also mentioned as preventing effective crisis communication. Organisations should learn from the mistakes of other companies and put crisis communication plans in place. Various PR practitioners felt strongly that leader indecisiveness definitely prevents effective crisis communication. CEOs and executives should have sufficient experience and knowledge that they can make decisions as quickly as possible. In doing this, leaders should appoint competent spokespersons to gather information as quickly as possible and perform their crisis communication.

From the results, PR practitioners supported Wendling et al. (2013) that if organisations did not have proper policies in place that defined legal requirements, this was regarded as preventing effective communication. Organisations had to ensure policies included how the organisation reacts regarding possible legal claims and protocols to follow, and also that the legal department had an opportunity to include their requirements in the narrative prior to communications.

Contributing to literature, PR practitioners mentioned that the attitude the spokesperson or CEO takes during crisis response could prevent effective crisis communication. CEOs should not be arrogant in their approach but rather, have an attitude of caring and empathy towards stakeholders. Fear could also prevent effective crisis communication and spokespersons should build a trust relationship with journalists and undergo training if

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required. The organisation should not let the ability to apologise hold them back in their effective crisis communication. Indeed, their strategy should be to apologise, take control and move forward. From their experience, PR practitioners noted that fear of reputational damage could prevent effective crisis communication. Organisations should properly prepare their CEOs and spokespersons in media communication. They should know what to say and what not to say when a crisis has occurred, as the organisation's reputation could be damaged if the incorrect messages are sent out. This could be resolved by proper communication and media training for the spokespersons and CEOs.

PR practitioners supported Grégoire et al. (2015) that if organisations are not aware of where social media threats originate, they are not able to manage the various forms of emotions generated via the social media interactions. The findings from this study showed that PR practitioners were of the opinion that the effect of social media does prevent organisations from communicating effectively. However, this is only until they understand social media and how to utilise it to their advantage, after which they can be proactive and control the communications on social media.

Contradicting Veil et al. (2011), the findings from this research showed that stakeholders could prevent effective crisis communications when using social media. Organisations need to understand that the trust relationships with their stakeholders must be built long before a crisis occurs. Employees are to be seen as ambassadors for the organisation and not as a threat when crises occur. Journalists are critical in the trust relationship and CEOs need to be open to holding media interviews during the good times.

6.4.3. Summary of Discussion on Research Question 3

Connecting the findings from this study to literature, it can be seen that organisational drivers that enable effective crisis communication are regarded by PR practitioners as utilising the CEO as a spokesperson. PR practitioners contributed to literature in mentioning that the characteristics of a CEO which enable communication included for them to have the correct attitude, to be available immediately, to be knowledgeable and up to speed on the incident, and to have a visual identity with the public. PR practitioners supported literature in advising organisations to build up reputation resilience.

It was also shown in practice that organisational drivers which prevent effective crisis communication should be avoided by PR practitioners during communication. PR practitioners contributed to literature by adding that leader indecisiveness definitely prevented effective crisis communication, noting that CEOs and executives should have sufficient experience and knowledge that they can make decisions as quickly as possible.

Contributing to literature, PR practitioners mentioned that the attitude that the spokesperson or CEO takes during crisis response could prevent effective crisis communication. The findings from this study also showed that PR practitioners were of the opinion that the effect of social media, which has changed the landscape, does prevent organisations from communicating effectively. Lastly, findings from this research showed that stakeholders could prevent effective crisis communications and that organisations need to understand that the trust relationships with their stakeholders must be built long before a crisis occurs. Employees are also regarded as stakeholders and are to be seen as ambassadors for the organisation, and not as a threat when crises occur.

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter has presented a discussion on the results from Chapter Five, evaluated in the context of literature from Chapter Two. The findings presented in Chapter Five were found to be consistent with literature, though various novel findings have been mentioned by PR practitioners.

It was seen from literature that organisations should be identifying the crisis origins, the types of crises and the intensity as preparation for their crisis management plans. Organisations are not following these guidelines in practice and it is evident that the origin of the crisis influences the crisis outcome. Organisations are to focus on the issues within their organisation and resolve them before they escalate into crises. Practice has shown that there is a relationship between the crisis type and crisis intensity and how organisations are responding in practice. Organisations are not responding properly, leading to double crises as mentioned in literature.

This research has also shown that effective crisis communication is primarily regarded by academics as building credibility and trust through the crisis response process. The findings have shown that organisations firstly follow a positive strategy, which ensures their

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communications are effective. The spokespersons need to respond rapidly with the initial response following the crisis and ensure their response is credible, backed by factual information. This will ensure the spokesperson is in control of the communication process. Good media communications are to be utilised by the organisation to ensure they follow a proactive engagement by controlling the narrative on mass media. Where social media is utilised, monitoring tools are required to ensure the organisation stays on top of communications. The research supported literature in advising spokespersons to communicate with honesty, ensuring they are always open and transparent in their responses. Spokespersons or CEOs should respond with rapport at all times, as there would be victims; all stakeholders want the organisation to show compassion to victims.

The research also contributed to literature in recommending to organisations that they show regret once an incident has occurred. Organisations must not stay absent or fail to show remorse, as this worsens the crisis situation. Organisations are required to gain resolution during their communications with their stakeholders by taking responsibility for the crisis, yet avoiding rationalism during their crisis narrative. Finally, PR practitioners said it was important for organisations to disclose to their stakeholders the cause and outcome of crisis incidents. This ensured stakeholders would obtain closure and also assist with rebuilding the organisation's reputation.

Contributing to literature, PR practitioners mentioned that utilising the CEO as a spokesperson enabled effective crisis communication. PR practitioners also said that CEOs need to build trust relationships with their stakeholders prior to crises taking place and not attempt to build trust relationships during a crisis situation, as this could affect the organisation's reputation. Lastly, PR practitioners advised organisations to cultivate reputation resilience by building up the bank of goodwill with the mitigation factors, preventing crises from taking place.

PR practitioners stated that organisations should be aware of behaviours within the organisation, such as organisational restraint, which prevent effective crisis communication. PR practitioners also mentioned that leader indecisiveness definitely prevented effective crisis communication and noted that CEOs and executives should have sufficient experience and knowledge that they can make decisions as quickly as possible. Adding to existing literature, PR practitioners stated that the attitude which the spokesperson or CEO

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takes during crisis response could prevent effective crisis communication. The organisation should not let the ability to apologise hold them back in their effective crisis communication. PR practitioners were also of the opinion that the effect of social media, which has changed the landscape of communication, does prevent organisations from communicating effectively. Lastly, findings from this research showed that organisations need to understand that the trust relationships with their stakeholders must be built long before a crisis occurs.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Introduction

This research explored the understandings of PR practitioners in their perspectives of effective crisis communication by highlighting the gaps or anomalies between literature and companies in practice. This chapter concludes the discussion from Chapter Six. The best practices from different scholars which were compared and summarised in Table 6 were evaluated in the research and attempted to identify if gaps or anomalies existed with PR practitioners. A proposed framework is discussed in section 7.3 for effective crisis communication. The implications for business will be discussed as well, with the limitations for research then mentioned. Suggestions for future research were identified in the process of this research and could be utilised by future scholars.

7.2. Principal Findings

This exploratory research has successfully reviewed the research problem to understand the perspectives of PR practitioners regarding effective crisis communication. The principal findings of this study can be summarised into four main areas. Firstly, to understand different crises and how organisations need to identify and categorise different crises. Secondly, to identify the organisational drivers that enable effective crisis communication. Thirdly, to uncover the organisational drivers that prevent effective crisis communication. Lastly, to highlight the behaviours that characterise effective crisis communication management.

7.2.1. Understanding Crises

The findings from this research show that organisations should be identifying the crisis origins, the types of crises and the intensity as preparation for their crisis management plans. Organisations are not following these guidelines in practice and it is evident that the origin of the issue influences the crisis outcome. If issues develop within an organisation, it is important for management to address these and mitigate them before they escalate and result in a crisis (Coombs, 2015). Moreover, organisations need to identify possible risks that could escalate into crises in their risk register. Each crisis type with possible crisis intensities and mitigating actions should be developed. Practice has shown that there is a relationship between the crisis type and crisis intensity and how organisations are

responding in practice. The findings have supported Grebe (2013b) in stating that organisations are not responding properly, leading to double crises.

7.2.2. Organisational Drivers That Enable Effective Crisis Communication

From this research it was found that organisational drivers which enable effective crisis communication are regarded by academics as implementing proper crisis communication plans in an organisation, which include proper planning and response plans. Academics noted that social media tools, such as monitoring social media platforms, will assist organisations to know what is happening on social media and what the pre-crisis reputation is of the company (Veil et al., 2011). PR practitioners mentioned that stakeholder communication is the base of building proper trust relationships between the organisation and all its stakeholders. This needs to be done prior to a crisis taking place, and not during crises, as this could impact on the reputation of the organisation. This study has also shown that utilising the CEO as a spokesperson enabled effective crisis communication. PR practitioners mentioned certain CEO characteristics that enable communication, including for the CEO to have the correct attitude, to be available immediately, to be knowledgeable and up to speed on the incident and to have a visual identity with the public. PR practitioners further advised that CEOs need to build trust relationships with their stakeholders prior to crises taking place and not attempt to build trust relationships during a crisis situation, as this could affect the organisation's reputation. PR practitioners advised organisations to cultivate reputation resilience, which is built up by the bank of goodwill together with the mitigation factors to ensure effective crisis communication within the organisation. Lastly, PR practitioners supported literature in the importance of having a correct spokesperson. Respondents said the spokesperson or CEO must be available immediately and recommended that only one spokesperson be used to ensure consistency in communication. They did, however, stress that the spokesperson was to be a competent, knowledgeable and experienced spokesperson with a high level of authority.

7.2.3. Organisational Drivers That Prevent Effective Crisis Communication

Literature has shown that organisational drivers which prevent effective crisis communication are regarded by academics as risk of financial loss, possible legal claims, the political climate, security protocol and the risk of personal liability (Wendling et al., 2013). PR practitioners advised that organisations should be aware of drivers within the

organisation that prevent effective crisis communication. Organisational restraint was regarded as an important behaviour that could be eliminated by implementing crisis communication plans. This study has also shown that leader indecisiveness prevents effective crisis communication, and CEOs and executives should have sufficient experience and knowledge that they can make decisions quickly.

From the discussions with PR practitioners it was noted that the attitude which the spokesperson or CEO takes during crisis response could prevent effective crisis communication. The organisation should not let the ability to apologise hold them back in their effective crisis communication. Indeed, their strategy should be to apologise, take control and move forward. The findings from this study also showed that PR practitioners were of the opinion that the effect of social media prevents organisations from communicating effectively, as it has vastly changed the landscape. Lastly, findings from this research showed that stakeholders could prevent effective crisis communications but that organisations need to understand that the trust relationships with their stakeholders need to be built long before a crisis occurs. Employees are also regarded as stakeholders and are to be seen as ambassadors for the organisation and not as a threat when crises occur.

7.2.4. Behaviours That Characterise Effective Crisis Communication

This research has shown that effective crisis communication is primarily regarded by academics as building credibility and trust through the crisis response process (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014).

Table 8

Comparison of best practices for effective crisis communication

Summarised Best Practices from Literature	Summarised Best Practices from Practice
Correct spokesperson	Rapid response
Crisis communication plan	Credibility
Stakeholder engagement	Good media communications
Good media communications	Honesty
Honesty	Rapport
Credibility and trust	Regret

Rapport	Resolution
Resolution	Responsibility
	Restitution
	Avoiding rationalism
	Disclosure

Table 8 compares findings from this research with the best practices that constitute effective crisis communication as recommended by academics (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014; Seeger, 2006; Veil et al., 2011). The findings have extended literature in showing that spokespersons need to respond rapidly with the initial response following the crisis and ensure their response is credible, backed by facts. This will ensure that the spokesperson is in control of the communication process. Good media communications are to be utilised by the organisation to ensure they follow a proactive engagement by controlling the narrative on mass media. Social media platforms are growing bigger and faster, as stated at the fourth quarter 2017, Facebook had 2.2 billion monthly active users and as at the third quarter 2017, Twitter had 330 million monthly active users (Statista, 2018). Twitter has the capability to deliver instantaneous information, even in the absence of mass media (Wasike, 2013). Where social media is utilised, monitoring tools are required to ensure the organisation stays on top of communications.

The research supported literature in advising spokespersons to communicate with honesty, ensuring they are always open and transparent in their responses. Spokespersons or CEOs should respond with rapport at all times as there would be victims – all stakeholders want the organisation to show compassion to the victims.

The research has contributed to literature in recommending to organisations that they show regret once an incident has occurred. Organisations must not stay absent and not show remorse to victims, as this worsens the crisis situation. Organisations are required to gain resolution during their communications with their stakeholders by taking responsibility for the crisis, yet avoiding rationalism during their crisis narrative. Finally, PR practitioners stated that it was important for organisations to disclose to their stakeholders the cause and outcome of the crisis incident. This ensured stakeholders would obtain closure and also assisted with rebuilding the organisation's reputation.

7.3. Proposed Framework

In conclusion it was found that there are gaps or anomalies between what literature recommends companies do in effective crisis communication and what companies appear to be doing in practice. It was shown in this study from the results in Chapter Six that crises mostly originate from issues within organisations, which could be prevented if organisations are aware of them.
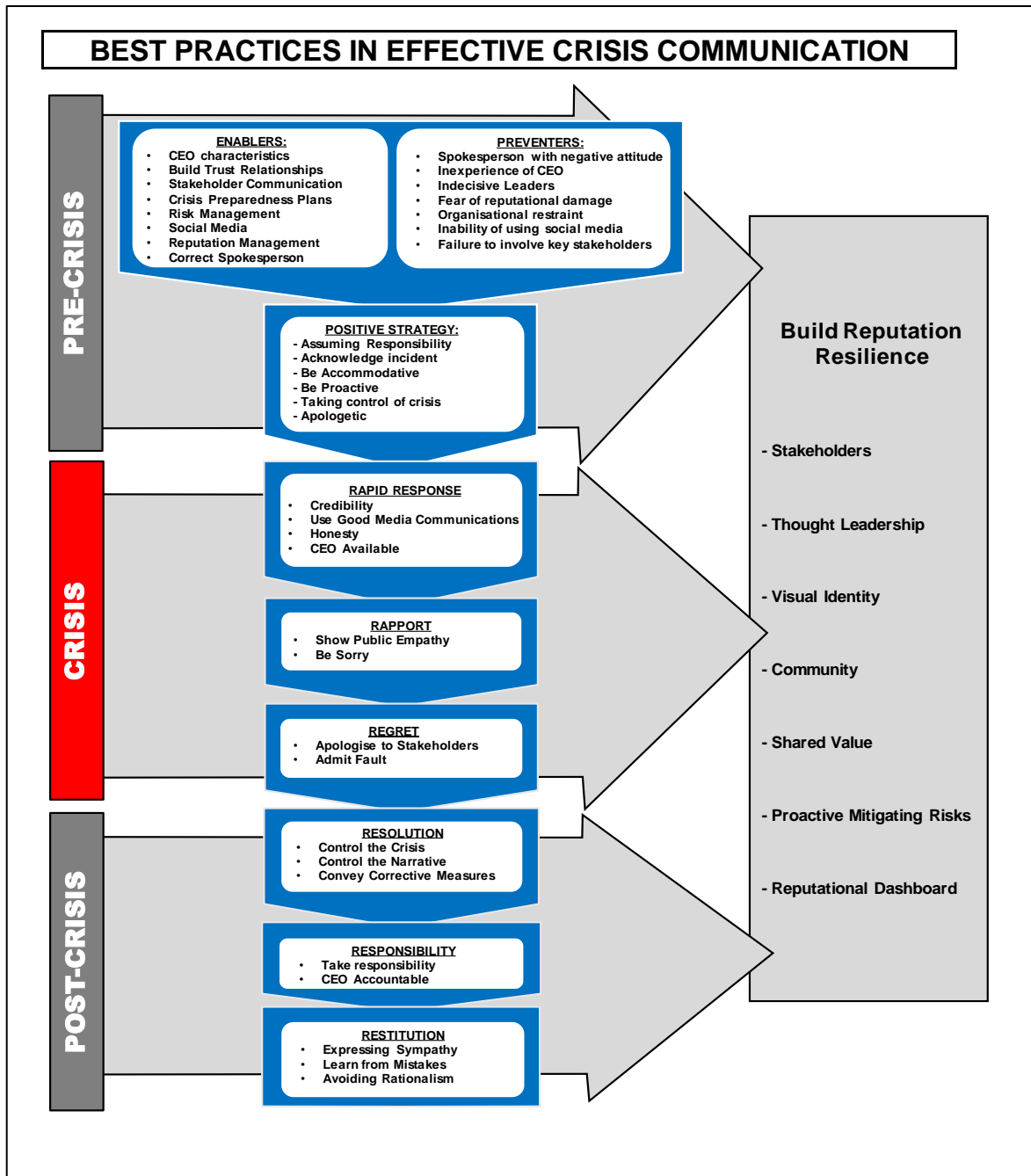
Figure 7. **Framework for effective crisis communication**

Organisations should be enabling themselves in pre-crisis situations to prepare for effective crisis communication as summarised from this study in Figure 7. This ranges from approaching crises with positive strategies to minimising the impact of the crisis on the organisation's reputation. Organisations need to utilise the correct spokespersons, ideally the CEO in significant incidents, and focus on building trust relationships before rather than during crises, engaging with all their stakeholders. To enable all these drivers, organisations need to formulate crisis preparedness plans with diligence to ensure they are well prepared for the risks they have identified in their risk registers. With social media having changed the communication landscape, organisations and CEOs need to be active on social media and ensure they have processes in place internally or externally to monitor their activities at all times. All of this is required to build the reputation resilience of an organisation. In good times, organisations need to bank their goodwill and ensure that sufficient mitigating factors have been put in place.

Literature has suggested best practices for effective crisis communication as summarised in Table 8. This research has expanded on literature to give the perspectives of PR practitioners who are experienced in crisis communications. Although the sample interviewed was small, additional perspectives could be obtained from more businesses or from other countries. The perspectives of the PR practitioners led to a proposed framework of best practice for effective communication, which could further enable organisations and CEOs in their response strategies.

While some aspects have been stated by academics as important practices, this framework summarises the perspectives or PR practitioners as they have experienced involvement in significant crises with organisations. Organisations should review these best practices and attempt to implement aspects of these practices that are practical and suitable for their future crisis situations.

7.4. Implications for Business

This research has highlighted best practices for organisations and PR practitioners to implement effective crisis communication during crisis situations. Literature has shown that crises are hitting with greater frequency and that 30% of CEOs are expecting more than

one crisis in the next three years (PWC, 2016). PR practitioners "need to be more vigilant than ever about their brand's social media presence" (Le, 2017, p. 1) and need to put out social media fires by acting quickly with PR crisis communication. Despite possible guidelines being available on how to manage crises (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016), companies do not seem to be responding effectively in their crisis communications.

This study has identified best practices for companies to respond more effectively during a crisis situation. Findings from this study could be advantageous to business in the following ways:

- The study identified positive strategies for organisations to follow regarding effective crisis communication.

- PR practitioners have mentioned their perspectives regarding the principles of ineffective crisis communication and how this negatively influences organisations.

- This research has identified organisational drivers that enable effective crisis communication.

- The study also identified organisational drivers that prevent organisations or spokespersons from performing effective crisis communications.

- Fundamentally, this study has identified the gaps between what literature states as best practices for crisis communication and what PR practitioners are recommending from their extensive experience.

- This research has been concluded with a proposed framework of best practices for effective crisis communication that could be implemented in organisations (Figure 7).

7.5. Research Limitations

This study was exploratory in nature and therefore the author was aware of the following limitations pertaining to the research:

- The respondents were selected from reputable PR companies in South Africa that had managed crises well on behalf of known companies in South Africa.

- The respondents were not all PR practitioners; some were journalists as well as PR communications staff within organisations.

- The PR companies chosen comprised a small sample of the population and did not necessarily represent the view of all companies in South Africa.

- The respondent could not have been completely candid in answering sensitive questions as he/she might have been cautious in revealing sensitive information regarding well-known companies as part of their client base.
- Subject bias could have threatened the reliability of the respondent responses, as the assumption was that the PR practitioners would give reliable information and not think that telling the truth may have shown them in a bad light (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).
- The analysis of the information provided by the respondents would be subjective and could have been influenced by the researcher's own perceptions of how well the company had communicated in a crisis. However, evidence would be presented for all claims made during analysis of the information.
- Limitations could also have been created as to the methodology, design, population size and sampling of this research by the researcher.

7.6. Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the findings derived from this research, the following topics are suggested as potential considerations for future research:

- A correlation study between the crisis descriptor and the response taken by the organisation to establish if there is a relationship between the crisis origin, the type of crisis and the intensity of the crisis affecting the outcome of the crisis response. As spokespersons are not experienced in all crises, they possibly react differently to different crises when they occur. This could depend on the origin of the crisis, the type of the crisis or even the crisis intensity. The personality of the spokesperson could also play a role.
- An exploratory study to understand if there is a relationship between the type of crisis, crisis intensity and how organisations are responding in practice. Practice shows that organisations are responding differently to different crises. Organisations are staying absent and avoiding response. Could this be related to the type of crisis or the crisis intensity?
- The best practices framework can be validated by quanitatively testing a larger sample of PR practitioners to understand if more organisations are following these best practices. The sample size was limited to 14 respondents. More interviews with

PR practitioners could be held to validate the findings from this study and if other themes emerge.

- A comparative study of organisations in South Africa and foreign countries to establish if the best practices are similar or different. The study could be extended beyond South African borders to establish if there is a difference in how organisations in South Africa are reacting during crisis communication and how organisations in other countries react.

- An exploratory study to understand an organisation's reputation resilience in comparison to crisis communication. Some organisations build up reputation resilience over time.

- An exploratory study to understand the CEO's behaviour during crisis situations. Practice has shown that crises are not managed well by CEOs. The behaviour of the CEO could be influenced by the type of crisis or even by their own personality or experience.

7.7. Conclusion

This study has provided new insights into effective crisis communication. The findings show that there are gaps between what academics are saying in literature and what actually happens in practice. The advantage, however, is that, as noted by various respondents, organisations should adopt a learning attitude to improve their crisis communication practices. The findings stated in this research could be fallible but organisations should take the learnings mentioned in this paper and apply them accordingly to their organisations. Literature has shown that crises are occurring with greater frequency, with 30% of CEOs expecting more than one crisis in the next three years (PWC, 2016). CEOs or spokespersons should adopt these positive recommendations and be agile enough in their crisis communication strategies to be aware of what aspects of this research could be beneficial during a significant crisis situation.

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9. APPENDICES

9.1. Appendix A: Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) Lifecycle

Pre-crisis	Initial	Maintenance	Resolution	Evaluation
■ Be prepared. ■ Foster alliances. ■ Develop consensus recommendations. ■ Test messages.	■ Acknowledge the event with empathy. ■ Explain and inform the public, in simplest forms, about the risk. ■ Establish agency and spokesperson credibility. ■ Provide emergency courses of action, including how and where to get more information. ■ Commit to stakeholders and the public to continue communication.	■ Help the public more accurately understand its own risks. ■ Provide background and encompassing information to those who need it. ■ Gain understanding and support for response and recovery plans. ■ Listen to stakeholder and audience feedback, and correct misinformation. ■ Explain emergency recommendations. ■ Empower risk/benefit decision-making.	■ Improve appropriate public response in future similar emergencies through education. ■ Honestly examine problems and mishaps, and then reinforce what worked in the recovery and response efforts. ■ Persuade the public to support public policy and resource allocation to the problem. ■ Promote the activities and capabilities of the agency, including reinforcing its corporate identity, both internally and externally.	■ Evaluate communication plan performance. ■ Document lessons learned. ■ Determine specific actions to improve crisis systems or the crisis plan.

Reference: Reynolds and Seeger (2014)

9.2. Appendix B: Research Design

RESEARCH DESIGN: INTEGRATION OF LITERATURE WITH RESEARCH QUESTIONS
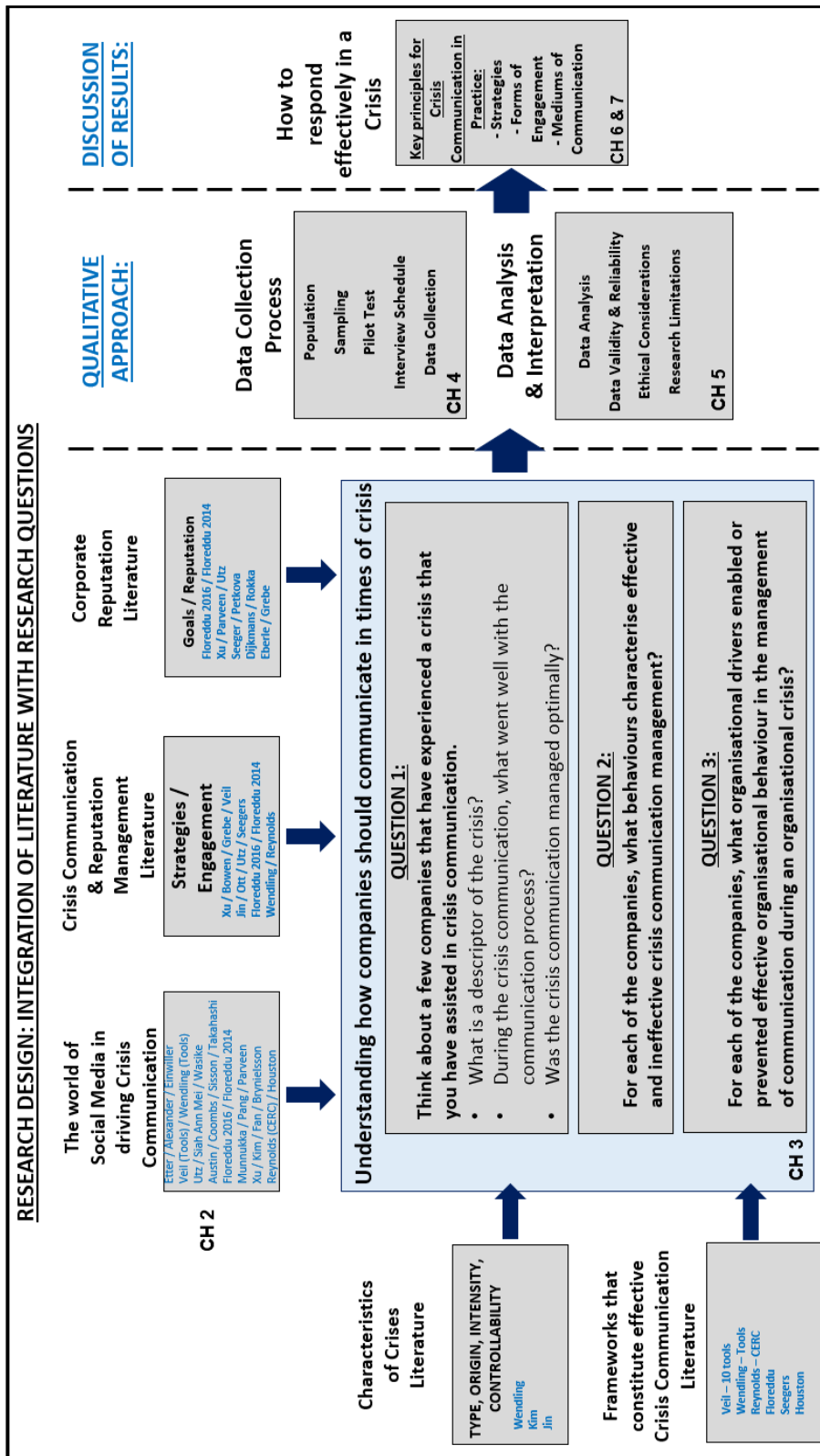
9.3. Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Name: **Start Time:**
Organisation: **End Time:**
Job Title:
Date:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview session. Your time is appreciated and your input to this research is valued.

The title of this research is **Effective crisis communication management: Perspectives from public relations practitioners.** The scope of this research is restricted to understanding how companies communicate during a crisis situation. Some companies rely on their own internal communication, while other companies rely on PR companies to communicate on their behalf.

The purpose of this research is to understand whether or not there are gaps between what literature recommends how companies should respond in crisis communication and what companies appear to be doing in practice, and if there are gaps, why do they exist? Secondly, once a crisis occurs, there is so much more to manage than just the response and communication of the crisis, but this paper will focus primarily on crisis communication and not the other aspects of crises. Thirdly this scope will evolve around the experience of PR practitioners in their involvement with companies during crises, and not with the companies that experienced the crises themselves.

The nature of this research is both conversational and exploratory. As agreed the information shared in this interview will be held confidential and all data will be reported anonymously.

As we start, may I confirm that I have your permission to record the interview using an audio recorder, for the purpose of performing proper data analysis? May I please request you to read and sign the Interview Consent Form as attached?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Thinking about a few companies that have experienced a crisis that you have assisted in crisis communication, I would like to discuss how these companies managed their crisis communication.

For the FIRST COMPANY:

Question 1a:

As an overview:

    a. What is a descriptor of the crisis?

    b. During the crisis communication, what went well with the communication process?

    c. How was the crisis communication managed?

Question 1b:

For the second company:

    a. What is a descriptor of the crisis?

    b. During the crisis communication, what went well with the communication process?

    c. How was the crisis communication managed?

Question 2:

    a. What behaviours characterise effective crisis communication management?

    b. What behaviours characterise ineffective crisis communication management?

If not mentioned, some probing themes:

- Recognition of the goals achieved
- Strategies followed in the crisis response
- Forms of engagement during the crisis
- Usage of communication mediums
- Management of public emotions

- Quality of reputation management
- CEO Characteristics

Question 3:

a. **What organisational drivers enabled effective organisational behaviour in the management of communication during an organisational crisis?**

b. **What organisational drivers prevented effective organisational behaviour in the management of communication during an organisational crisis?**

Possible themes to emerge:

- Capability of CEO
- Legal Claims
- Risk of financial loss
- Personal Liability
- Crisis preparation
- Corporate or security Protocol
- Political influence
- Organisational climate

Question 4:

Based on your valuable experience, do you have any additional information you would like

to add?

9.4. Appendix D: Invitation to Participate in Research Study

Dear ……… (Respondents name)

Thank you for taking time to discuss your participation in the interview. As mentioned, I am busy performing my MBA research project at the Gordon Institute of Business Science and am required to perform this compulsory research.

I am going to discuss the approaches that companies should be taking to communicate effectively during a crisis and what companies need to prepare to follow these guidelines.

Please can you confirm your willingness to participate in the research project as discussed during our telephonic conversation, and indicate your availability to be interviewed during a one hour session, at your offices, during the month of September 2018?

I look forward to hearing from you soonest.
Best Regards

Kobus Jonker
Kobus.jonker2@sasol.com
Cell: 079-524-3433

9.5. Appendix E: Interview Consent Form

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Gordon Institute
of Business Science
University of Pretoria

Researcher: Kobus Jonker, MBA Student at the Gordon Institute of Business Science

I am conducting research on effective crisis communication, and how companies appear to be communicating during a crisis. Our interview is expected to last 45 minutes to 1 hour, and will help us understand the views of public relations (PR) practitioners, whether they agree or disagree with recommendations on how companies communicate effectively during a crisis.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. The audio-recording of this interview is voluntary and will not be recorded if you so choose. All data will be reported anonymously, with identifiers used in place of your and your company's name(s). **To confirm the names of your clients will not be requested, to protect their anonymity.** If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or myself. Our details are provided below.

Researcher: Kobus Jonker   Research Supervisor: Prof. Nicola Kleyn

Email: kjonker100@gmail.com   Email: kleynn@gibs.co.za

Phone: 079-524-3433   Phone: +27 11 771 4329

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____   Date: _____ 2018

Researcher's Name: _____

Signature: _____   Date: _____ 2018

9.6. Appendix F: ATLAS.ti® Codebook

Name	Grounded	Density	Groups
◇ CEO Characteristic: Ability to perform media interview	14	1	
◇ CEO Characteristic: Able to deal with crisis	3	1	
◇ CEO Characteristic: Be accountable	6	1	
◇ CEO Characteristic: Empathetic	5	1	
◇ CEO Characteristic: Ethical	2	1	
◇ CEO Characteristic: Good leader	1	1	
◇ CEO Characteristic: Know how to plan	1	1	
◇ CEO Characteristic: Know what to say	3	1	
◇ CEO Characteristic: Learning attitude	2	1	
◇ CEO Characteristic: Open and Honest	2	1	
◇ CEO Characteristic: Respond quickly	8	1	
◇ CEO Characteristic: Strong Personality	3	1	
◇ CEO Characteristic: Understand the business	1	1	
◇ CEO Characteristic: Visual Identity	2	1	
◇ Crisis Concept Themes	0	8	[Crisis Management]
◇ Crisis Info Theme	0	5	[Crisis Management]
◇ Crisis Info: First line	1	1	
◇ Crisis Info: Not pushed	1	1	
◇ Crisis Info: Pre-incident to community	1	1	
◇ Crisis Info: Template - Comprehensive	3	1	
◇ Crisis Info: Template - Contain crisis Information	2	1	
◇ Crisis Management: Media Room	2	0	
◇ Crisis Manager Theme	0	4	[Crisis Management]
◇ Crisis Manager: Approval	2	1	
◇ Crisis Manager: First priority is crisis	1	1	
◇ Crisis Manager: Reports to CEO	1	1	
◇ Crisis Manager: Signs off on media release	1	1	
◇ Crisis Outcome: Giving CEO's Golden Handshakes	1	0	
◇ Crisis Severity Theme	0	2	[Crisis Management]
◇ Crisis Severity: Level of authorisation	2	1	
◇ Crisis Severity: Mass Media for significant incidents	1	1	
◇ Crisis Team Theme	0	2	[Crisis Management]
◇ Crisis Team: Leader, External Comms, Internal Com...	2	2	
◇ Crisis Team: PRP, CEO, HoLegal, HoComms	7	2	
◇ Crisis Theme: Public Relations Practitioner	0	6	[Crisis Management]
◇ Crisis Type: Allegations of theft	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Assault	1	1	

Name	Grounded	Density	Groups
◇ Crisis Type: Assault	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Audio recording in Board meeting	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: BEE Forums	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Bridge Collapse	2	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Employee legal action	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Environmental	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Fatalities	2	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Finance Issue	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Food poisoning	5	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Fraud	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Gas Incident	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Genderism	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Hostage situation	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Industrial Explosion	2	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Land Invasion	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Mining rights issue	2	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Operating license suspension	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Plane Crash	3	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Political Marches	2	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Racism	3	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Rape on property	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Reputational	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Sexual Misconduct	2	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Strike	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Suicide on property	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Taking photos in public of Executives	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Vehicle defect	1	1	
◇ Crisis Type: Water Contamination	1	1	
◇ Crisis Types Themes	0	29	[Crisis Management]
◇ Crisis: 8 R's and D	1	1	
◇ Crisis: Control is myth	1	1	
◇ Crisis: Double Crisis	1	1	
◇ Crisis: External impact - Currency	1	1	
◇ Crisis: Inevitable	2	1	
◇ Crisis: No control	1	1	
◇ Crisis: Real business crisis	2	1	
◇ Crisis: Warning Signals	1	1	

Name	Grounded	Density	Groups
○ ◇ Crisis: Warning Signals	1	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler Theme: Building Trust & Relationships	0	9	[Organisational Behaviour Enable
○ ◇ ECC Enabler Theme: CEO Characteristic~	0	16	[Organisational Behaviour Enable
○ ◇ ECC Enabler Theme: Crisis Team	0	2	[Organisational Behaviour Enable
○ ◇ ECC Enabler Theme: Emergency Preparedness Plan	0	14	[Organisational Behaviour Enable
○ ◇ ECC Enabler Theme: Organisational Behaviour	0	6	[Organisational Behaviour Enable
○ ◇ ECC Enabler Theme: Reputation Resilience	0	14	[Organisational Behaviour Enable
○ ◇ ECC Enabler Theme: Social Media	0	4	[Organisational Behaviour Enable
○ ◇ ECC Enabler Theme: Spokesperson	0	15	[Organisational Behaviour Enable
○ ◇ ECC Enabler Theme: Stakeholder Communication	0	9	[Organisational Behaviour Enable
○ ◇ ECC Enabler Theme: Value relationships	0	1	[Organisational Behaviour Enable
● ◇ ECC Enabler: 90 Day Recovery Plan	2	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Attitude towards safety	1	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler: Bank of Goodwill	3	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler: Believing this could happen to us	1	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler: Board member with Reputational Lens	5	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Build trust during crisis	4	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Building relationships	34	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Capacitate employees as Ambassadors	9	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: CEO on speed dial with PRP	4	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Client to understand licence to operate	2	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Communication with Stakeholders	8	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Constantly feed reporters facts	1	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler: Credible PRP Support	5	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Crisis Comms Plan	14	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler: Crisis leverage on Social Media	5	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Crisis Readiness - Exercises	32	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler: EPP Stakeholder list	3	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Equip crisis managers	1	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Exceptionally efficient	2	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Executive response training	21	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler: Executive trusts PRP	4	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Executives must understand Crisis Co...	1	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Follow Protocol	21	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler: Good Communication structure	2	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler: Having a "Love Mark"	1	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: House performance culture	11	1	

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Name	Grounded		Density		Groups
◆ ◇ ECC Enabler: House performance culture	▬	11	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Identify Risks	▪	4	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Invest emotional intelligence	▮	1	▮	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler: Know how to respond	▪	2	▮	1	
◆ ◇ ECC Enabler: Know the main crises what you stand for	▪	2	▮	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler: Mitigation Measures	▪	2	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Multi platforms	▮	1	▮	1	
◆ ◇ ECC Enabler: Network of third party context builders	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Pre-approved Hymn Sheet	▬▬	19	▮	1	
◆ ◇ ECC Enabler: Proactive Risk Planning	▬	10	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Quality of Leadership	▬	10	▮	1	
◆ ◇ ECC Enabler: Reporters to use neutral tone when re...	▮	1	▮	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler: Reputation Resilience	▬	12	▪	2	
◆ ◇ ECC Enabler: Shuffling executives at top	▮	1	▮	1	
◆ ◇ ECC Enabler: Social Media House Rules	▪	2	▮	1	
◆ ◇ ECC Enabler: Spokesperson has authority	▬	9	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Spokesperson to be Subject Matter ex...	▬	8	▮	1	
◆ ◇ ECC Enabler: Strategy is well articulated	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Enabler: Template - Crisis Response on Social...	▮	1	▮	1	
◆ ◇ ECC Enabler: Understanding networks of influence	▮	1	▮	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler: Value Relationships - All Stakeholders	▬▬	21	▮	1	
○ ◇ ECC Enabler: Willingness to speak before facts	▮	1	▮	1	
○ ◇ ECC Preventer Theme: Attitude		0	▬	6	[Organisational Behaviour Prever
○ ◇ ECC Preventer Theme: Effect of Social Media		0	▪	4	[Organisational Behaviour Prever
○ ◇ ECC Preventer Theme: Inexperience		0	▬	6	[Organisational Behaviour Prever
○ ◇ ECC Preventer Theme: Organisation Restraint		0	▬	9	[Organisational Behaviour Prever
○ ◇ ECC Preventer Theme: Reputational Risk		0	▪	2	[Organisational Behaviour Prever
○ ◇ ECC Preventer Theme: Stakeholders		0	▪	2	[Organisational Behaviour Prever
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Ability to apologise	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Allowing Legal & Insurance Dept's t...	▬	14	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Arrogance	▬	9	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Fear	▪	4	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Feeling personally offended	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Foresight	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Handled crisis badly	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Inexperience with Crisis Comm	▬	8	▮	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Involving stakeholders	▬	5	▮	1	

Name	Grounded		Density		Groups
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Involving stakeholders	■	5	|	1	
○ ◇ ECC Preventer: Lack of competence	▪	2	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Lack of Credibility	|	1	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Lack of Power	|	1	|	1	
○ ◇ ECC Preventer: Lack of Resources	|	1	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Lawyers defensive strategy	■	7	|	1	
○ ◇ ECC Preventer: Leader indecisiveness	■	5	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Long line of approval	■	4	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Managing by Committee	■	4	|	1	
○ ◇ ECC Preventer: Media noise affects License to operate	|	1	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: No sincerity	|	1	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Not having procedures in place	▪	3	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Organisation with closed doors to e...	|	1	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Policy changes	|	1	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Political interference	▪	2	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Possible Insurance claims not paid	|	1	|	1	
○ ◇ ECC Preventer: Public content creators	|	1	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Radio station pulling message out of...	|	1	|	1	
○ ◇ ECC Preventer: Reputational Risk	■■	9	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Social Media has changed landscape	■■	10	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Time taken to gather information	▪	2	|	1	
● ◇ ECC Preventer: Too much consensus building	|	1	|	1	
○ ◇ Effective Theme: Avoiding Rationalism		0	■	3	[Effective Crisis Communication]
○ ◇ Effective Theme: Disclosure		0	▪	2	[Effective Crisis Communication]
○ ◇ Effective Theme: Good Media Comms		0	■■■	22	[Effective Crisis Communication]
○ ◇ Effective Theme: Honesty		0	■	6	[Effective Crisis Communication]
○ ◇ Effective Theme: Rapid Response		0	■■	8	[Effective Crisis Communication]
○ ◇ Effective Theme: Rapport		0	■	4	[Effective Crisis Communication]
○ ◇ Effective Theme: Regret		0	▪	2	[Effective Crisis Communication]
○ ◇ Effective Theme: Resolution		0	▪	2	[Effective Crisis Communication]
○ ◇ Effective Theme: Responsibility	|	1	■	5	[Effective Crisis Communication]
○ ◇ Effective Theme: Restitution		0	▪	3	[Effective Crisis Communication]
● ◇ Effective: Accessible to media	■	7	|	1	
○ ◇ Effective: Account for every victim during crisis	|	1	|	1	
● ◇ Effective: Actively responding	■■	18	■	3	
● ◇ Effective: Admitting you were wrong	■	4	▪	2	
● ◇ Effective: Agile	■	9	|	1	

	Name	Grounded	Density	Groups
●	◇ Effective: Agile	9	1	
●	◇ Effective: Apologize immediately	4	2	
○	◇ Effective: Avoid logical responses	1	1	
●	◇ Effective: Avoid statements	5	1	
●	◇ Effective: Be ready, ahead of News Cycle	3	1	
●	◇ Effective: Being Honest	8	1	
●	◇ Effective: Being in touch with incident	3	1	
●	◇ Effective: Being open & transparent	22	1	
●	◇ Effective: Cascade the message effectively	2	1	
●	◇ Effective: CEO is available	18	1	
●	◇ Effective: Confidence	2	1	
●	◇ Effective: Confidentiality	1	1	
●	◇ Effective: Consistent	10	1	
●	◇ Effective: Controlling the crisis & narrative	19	2	
●	◇ Effective: Direct communications with media	8	2	
○	◇ Effective: Disclosing reasons why	2	1	
●	◇ Effective: Do what it takes	2	2	
○	◇ Effective: Don't take liability	1	0	
●	◇ Effective: Don't undermine trust	3	1	
○	◇ Effective: Explain Corrective Measures	8	1	
●	◇ Effective: Fact Verification	29	1	
●	◇ Effective: Give public assurance	7	1	
●	◇ Effective: Know what to communicate	24	1	
●	◇ Effective: Learning from crises	6	2	
●	◇ Effective: Legal Dept sight of media release	14	1	
●	◇ Effective: Let people know who you are	1	1	
○	◇ Effective: Media trusts spokesperson	4	1	
●	◇ Effective: Monitor Social Media	23	1	
●	◇ Effective: Not filtering info	1	1	
○	◇ Effective: Nous, using your common sense	1	1	
●	◇ Effective: Politically correct	1	1	
●	◇ Effective: Proactive engagement strategy	18	1	
○	◇ Effective: Proper body language	1	1	
●	◇ Effective: PRP facilitates media release	3	1	
●	◇ Effective: Publicly empathetic	25	1	
●	◇ Effective: Quick response	38	1	
○	◇ Effective: Ranking of stakeholder response	2	1	

Name ▲	Grounded		Density		Groups
○ ◇ Effective: Ranking of stakeholder response		2		1	
○ ◇ Effective: Restitution, giving back		5		1	
● ◇ Effective: Simple		4		1	
● ◇ Effective: Social Media communication		12		1	
● ◇ Effective: Sympathy		4		2	
● ◇ Effective: Take immediate responsibility		12		1	
● ◇ Effective: Taking public seriously		1		1	
● ◇ Effective: Transcribe into media language		5		1	
● ◇ Effective: Truthfull		1		1	
● ◇ Effective: Undercut false information		1		1	
● ◇ Effective: Visual crisis communication		2		1	
○ ◇ EPP (Enabler Theme): Emergency Preparedness Plans		0		13	[Organisational Behaviour Enable
● ◇ EPP: Crisis Training		4		1	
● ◇ EPP: Emergency Response Procedure		12		1	
○ ◇ EPP: Firstly ensure everyone is safe		1		1	
● ◇ EPP: Getting feedback from Media		3		1	
● ◇ EPP: Identify Flag Raisers for Crises		3		1	
● ◇ EPP: Involve stakeholders		4		1	
● ◇ EPP: Preparedness		19		1	
● ◇ EPP: Risk Register		7		1	
● ◇ EPP: Script for CEO		1		1	
● ◇ EPP: Towing Guide		1		1	
○ ◇ ERP: Recovery Phase		2		1	
○ ◇ Ineffective Theme: Alterior Communication Motives		0		4	[Ineffective Crisis Communicatior
○ ◇ Ineffective Theme: CEO		0		2	[Ineffective Crisis Communicatior
○ ◇ Ineffective Theme: Communication Behaviour		0		6	[Ineffective Crisis Communicatior
○ ◇ Ineffective Theme: Negative Response		0		12	[Ineffective Crisis Communicatior
○ ◇ Ineffective Theme: Negative Stakeholders		0		4	[Ineffective Crisis Communicatior
○ ◇ Ineffective: Being reactive		7		1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Being secretive		2		1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Building brand during crisis		4		1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Building relationships with media during...		7		1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Building resentment		1		1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: CEO attitude		11		1	
● ◇ Ineffective: Cold and informal		2		1	
● ◇ Ineffective: Deflecting attention away from crisis		3		1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Disgruntled stakeholders		2		1	

Name	Grounded		Density		Groups
○ ◇ Ineffective: Disgruntled stakeholders	▮	2	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Doing harm to public	▮	2	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Doing silent recalls	▮	2	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Inappropriate response to seriousness o...	▮	4	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Interaction with media	▮	2	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Knee-jerk reaction	▮	2	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Laying blame	▮	1	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Missing deadlines	▬	8	▮	2	
○ ◇ Ineffective: No empathy	▬	11	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: No response	▬	9	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Not authentic	▮	3	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Not considering cultural differences	▮	1	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Not explaining corrective measures quic...	▮	3	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Offensive way of communication	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ Ineffective: Old School	▮	4	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Poor visual identity	▮	1	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Public form perceptions	▮	3	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Slow response	▬▬	24	▮	1	
○ ◇ Ineffective: Unprepared	▬	15	▮	1	
● ◇ Mass Media: Billboard Advertisement	▮	1	▮	1	
○ ◇ Mass Media: Campaign roll-out	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ Mass Media: Interaction	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ Mass Media: Journalist pools have shrunk	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ Mass Media: Local Radio Station	▬	13	▮	1	
● ◇ Mass Media: Pamphlets	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ Mass Media: Require facts	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ Media Release: Accurate	▮	2	▮	1	
● ◇ Media Release: Complete	▮	2	▮	1	
● ◇ Media Release: Data driven	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ Media Release: Incident Descriptor	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ Media Release: Inflated	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ Media Release: Official	▮	1	▮	1	
○ ◇ Media Release: Positive for company	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ Media Release: Pre-approval to local radio stations	▮	1	▮	1	
● ◇ Media Release: Removing emotive words	▮	1	▮	1	
○ ◇ Media Theme: Media Release		0	▬	9	[Media Communication]
○ ◇ Media Theme: Media Type		0	▬	9	[Media Communication]

Name	Grounded		Density		Groups
○ ◇ Media Theme: Media Type		0	▬	9	[Media Communication]
○ ◇ Media Type: Credibility in Twitter	▪	5	ǀ	1	
○ ◇ Media Type: Word of Mouth: Endorsement	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
● ◇ PRP: Available	▪	6	ǀ	1	
● ◇ PRP: Be honest	▪	2	ǀ	1	
● ◇ PRP: Communications Council to client	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
● ◇ PRP: Part of emergency team	▪	5	ǀ	1	
● ◇ PRP: Rendering a service	▪	2	ǀ	1	
● ◇ PRP: Understand social media	▪	2	ǀ	1	
○ ◇ Public Response Theme: Accusations		0	ǀ	1	[Public Response]
○ ◇ Public Response Theme: Assurance		0	▪	5	[Public Response]
○ ◇ Public Response Theme: Belonging		0	▬	8	[Public Response]
○ ◇ Public Response Theme: Betrayal		0	▪	5	[Public Response]
○ ◇ Public Response Theme: Emotions		0	ǀ	1	[Public Response]
● ◇ Public Response: Accusations due to lack of response	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Anger	▪	2	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Assurance of legal compliance	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Awareness	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Concerned for jobs	▪	2	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Confidence with emergency exerci...	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Criticism	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Desperate for response	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Endorsement	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Good response to emergencies	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Good understanding	▪	2	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Know the testing procedures	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Open to give feedback	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Sick of CEO's not held accountable	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Social Media Troll	ǀ	1		0	
● ◇ Public Response: Thinking worst of company	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
● ◇ Public Response: Uncertainty	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
○ ◇ Public: Assurance company control	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
○ ◇ Public: Blame company	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
○ ◇ Public: Involvement limited	ǀ	1	ǀ	1	
○ ◇ Public: Support	▪	2	ǀ	1	
○ ◇ Reputation Management: Reputation Dashboard Da...	▪	2	ǀ	1	
○ ◇ Reputation Pillars	▪	3	ǀ	1	

Name	Grounded		Density		Groups
○ ◇ Reputation Pillars	■	3	ı	1	
○ ◇ Reputation Resilience: Brand Security & Safety	■	3	ı	1	
○ ◇ Reputation Resilience: Community	ı	2	ı	1	
○ ◇ Reputation Resilience: Proactive mitigation	▬	9	ı	1	
○ ◇ Reputation Resilience: Shared Value	▬	6	ı	1	
○ ◇ Reputation Resilience: Stakeholders	▬	6	ı	1	
○ ◇ Reputation Resilience: Thought Leadership Platforms	▬	9	ı	1	
○ ◇ Reputation Resilience: Visual ID	■	3	ı	1	
○ ◇ Reputation: Severly impacted	■	3	ı	1	
○ ◇ Risk Register: Mitigation strategy	ı	1		0	
○ ◇ Risk Register: Potential Impact	ı	2		0	
○ ◇ Risk Register: Rank Likelihood	ı	1		0	
○ ◇ Senior Media Manager: Authorised	ı	1		0	
○ ◇ Senior Media Manager: Reports to CEO	ı	1		0	
● ◇ Social Media Manager	ı	1		0	
● ◇ Social Media: Ease of communication	■	3		0	
● ◇ Social Media: Initiates from employees to old emplo...	ı	2		0	
● ◇ Social Media: Problems	▬	7		0	
● ◇ Spokesperson: Available immediately	▬▬	18	ı	1	
○ ◇ Spokesperson: Buffer to CEO	ı	1	ı	1	
● ◇ Spokesperson: CEO on crisis affecting brand	■	4	ı	1	
○ ◇ Spokesperson: CEO on good news	ı	1	ı	1	
● ◇ Spokesperson: CEO on Significant Incidents	▬▬	25	ı	1	
● ◇ Spokesperson: CEO very media shy	■	3	ı	1	
○ ◇ Spokesperson: Competent	▬	7	ı	1	
● ◇ Spokesperson: Dedicated	■	3	ı	1	
○ ◇ Spokesperson: Empathetic	ı	1	ı	1	
● ◇ Spokesperson: Executive	▬	9	ı	1	
● ◇ Spokesperson: No gatekeeper as barrier	■	2	ı	1	
● ◇ Spokesperson: Nominated at business	▬	8	ı	1	
● ◇ Spokesperson: Not just fed information	ı	1	ı	1	
● ◇ Spokesperson: One	▬	8	ı	1	
● ◇ Spokesperson: PRP	▬	12	ı	1	
○ ◇ Strategy (Enabler Theme): Positive Strategies		0	▬▬	20	[Organisational Behaviour Enable
○ ◇ Strategy (Preventer Theme): Negative Strategies		0	▬▬	18	[Organisational Behaviour Prever
● ◇ Strategy Neg: Absence	▬▬	20	ı	1	
○ ◇ Strategy Neg: Being aggressive	ı	1	ı	1	

Name	Grounded		Density	Groups
● ◇ Strategy Neg: Absence		20	1	
○ ◇ Strategy Neg: Being aggressive		1	1	
● ◇ Strategy Neg: Cold & Formal Statement		3	1	
● ◇ Strategy Neg: Cover-up		6	1	
● ◇ Strategy Neg: Defensive		6	1	
○ ◇ Strategy Neg: Denying the issue		1	1	
● ◇ Strategy Neg: Diminishing		4	1	
○ ◇ Strategy Neg: Inappropriate compensation for victims		1	1	
● ◇ Strategy Neg: Legalistic		7	1	
● ◇ Strategy Neg: Managing by Committee		1	1	
● ◇ Strategy Neg: Minimise financial loss		2	1	
● ◇ Strategy Neg: Protective of business		2	1	
○ ◇ Strategy Neg: Shifting the blame		2	1	
● ◇ Strategy Neg: Silent product recall		1	1	
● ◇ Strategy Neg: Uncaring		1	1	
○ ◇ Strategy Neg: Unsympathetic		1	1	
○ ◇ Strategy Neg: Using emotive language		1	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Accomodative - Compensation		9	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Acknowledgement		7	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Apologetic		6	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Assuming responsibility		11	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Bravery		1	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Building Relationships with Trust		10	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Communicate essential info only		2	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Disengage		8	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Engaging		1	1	
○ ◇ Strategy Pos: Explain Corrective Action		1	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Individual response on Social media		2	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Involving public when fixing problem		2	1	
○ ◇ Strategy Pos: Keep Legal away from Media		1	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Legal warnings		4	1	
○ ◇ Strategy Pos: Proactive response		2	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Social Media self moderates		1	1	
○ ◇ Strategy Pos: Stakeholder first		1	0	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Sympathetic		1	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Taking Control		4	1	
● ◇ Strategy Pos: Visible		2	1	

9.7. Appendix G: Example of Effective Crisis Communication Code Group Report

Effective Crisis Communication

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1. **Effective Theme: Good Media Communications**

   a. **Effective: Fact Verification**

24 Quotations:

D 1: Respondent 1_Pilot - 1:11 verify them (1763:1773) /

D 1: Respondent 1_Pilot - 1:19 Now you have to start in town and you have to find out what is leaking… (2686:2775) /

D 1: Respondent 1_Pilot - 1:58 gathering the proper information (5172:5203) /

D 1: Respondent 1_Pilot - 1:129 until we are at such a point (10070:10098) /

D 1: Respondent 1_Pilot - 1:155 you have that feeling of reassurance that what you have said is correc… (12555:12626) /

D 1: Respondent 1_Pilot - 1:171 the time that you are in the cubicle where you start working and gathe… (13952:14083) /

D 1: Respondent 1_Pilot - 1:179 don't have all the information immediately (14090:14131) /

D 1: Respondent 1_Pilot - 1:181 You need to verify your facts. (14919:14948) /

D 1: Respondent 1_Pilot - 1:183 need to verify it (15020:15036) /

D 1: Respondent 1_Pilot - 1:207 you cannot disclose anything until you have done your investiga (17724:17786) /

D 1: Respondent 1_Pilot - 1:220 it is so important to make sure that your facts are 100 % correct (20797:20861) /

D 1: Respondent 1_Pilot - 1:267 more or less what happened and at what time (3955:3998) /

D 4: Respondent 4_20180905 FH - 4:201 they were giving a comprehensive list, (35085:35122)

D 5: Respondent 5_20180920 DC - 5:7 we pinned the information to the pop-up wall for one week (4196:4252) /

D 5: Respondent 5_20180920 DC - 5:51 we build content behind that what you will engage with (15749:15802) /

D 7: Respondent 6_20180921 NN - 7:24 We hadn't had the time to show you the report, we have these top 5 all… (9070:9190) /

D 7: Respondent 6_20180921 NN - 7:38 And the problem is SA, our media, although they are quite powerful, th… (16349:17451) /

D 7: Respondent 6_20180921 NN - 7:49 We actually did analysis, we took all the media clippings, there's som… (19164:19441) /

D 7: Respondent 6_20180921 NN - 7:98 don't have all the facts. And that's actually what we did

9.8. Appendix H: Ethical Clearance Letter

Gordon
Institute
of Business
Science

University
of Pretoria

08 August 2018

Jonker Jacobus

Dear Jacobus

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

Please note that approval is granted based on the methodology and research instruments provided in the application. If there is any deviation change or addition to the research method or tools, a supplementary application for approval must be obtained

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Kind Regards

GIBS MBA Research Ethical Clearance Committee

Gordon Institute of Business Science
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9.9. Appendix J: Summary of Respondents

Respondent	PR Practitioner	Media Reporter	Crisis No	Company Description	Crisis Descriptor Type
R1	X		C1	Petro Chemical	Industrial Explosion
			C2	Fuel Manufacturer	Gas Odour
R2		X	C3	Civil Construction	Bridge Collapse
			C4	Aviation	Plane Crash
R3	X		C5	Property	Death, Suicide
			C6	Civil Construction	Bridge Collapse
R4		X	C7	Food Manufacturer	Food Poisoning
			C8	Vehicle Manufacturer	Vehicle Defect
			C9	Food Retailer	Food Poisoning
R5	X		C10	Vehicle Manufacturer	Vehicle defect
			C11	Vehicle Manufacturer	Vehicle defect
R6	X		C12	Banking Industry	Financial Crisis
R7	X		C13	Mining	Mining rights claim
			C14	Retail	Employee legal action
R8	X		C15	Telecommunications	Death of Executives
			C16	Telecommunications	Operating License suspension
			C17	Insurance	Social Media crisis
R9	X		C18	Mining	Mining rights issue
			C19	Vehicle Manufacturer	Vehicle recall
R10	X		C20	Food Manufacturer	Food Poisoning
			C21	Airline Industry	Plane lost engine
R11		X	C22	Food Retail	Food Poisoning
			C23	Food Manufacturer	Food Poisoning
R12	X		C24	Petro Chemical	Industrial Explosion
R13	X		C25	Food Manufacturer	Food Poisoning
R14	X		C26	Mining	Fatalities

9.10. Appendix K: Company Responses

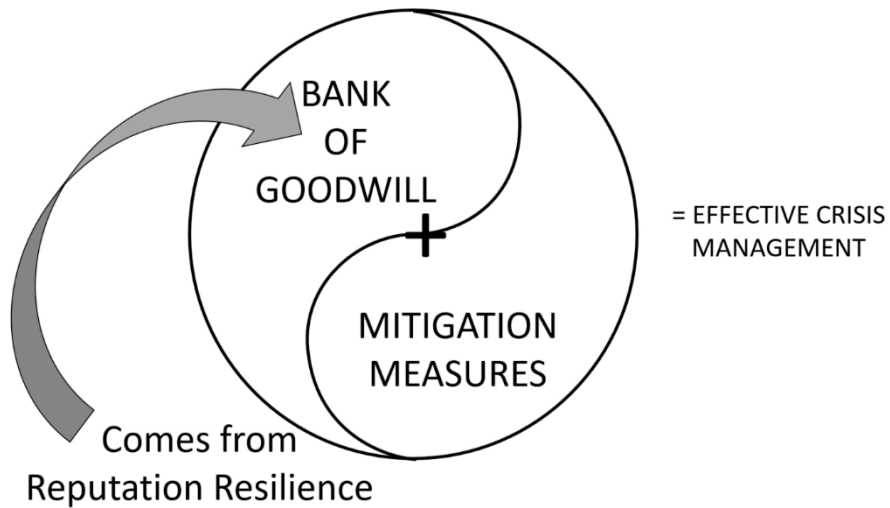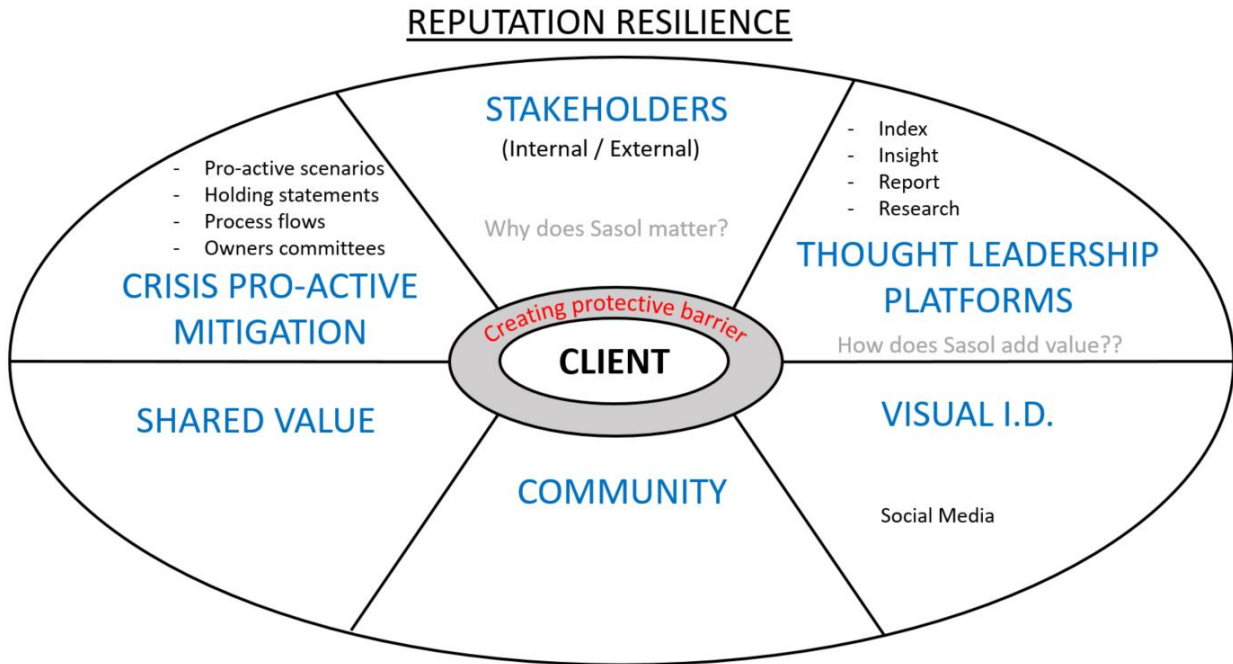| Company	Crisis Descriptor	Strategy	Response	Spokesperson
R1/1	Industrial Explosion	Formal, fact verification	Slow response	Senior Media Officer
R1/2	Gas Odour	Assuming responsibility, Taking control	Slow response, Open	Senior Media Officer
R2/1	Bridge Collapse	Formal, unsympathetic, absence	Slow response, No empathy	Executive
R2/2	Plane Crash	Taking control, Accommodative, Compensation, Assuming responsibility, Visible	Public assurance	CEO
R3/1	Death, Suicide	Absence, aggressive	Knee-jerk, Unprepared, Slow response	CEO
R3/2	Bridge Collapse	Absence, Cold, Acknowledgement, assuming responsibility	Slow response, No empathy, informal	Operational staff
R4/1	Food Poisoning	Cover-up, Denial, Absence	Slow response, absence, unapologetic	CEO
R4/2	Vehicle Defect	Absence, uncaring	Slow Response, No empathy, Unprepared	CEO
R4/3	Food Poisoning	Acknowledgement, Proactive, Assuming responsibility, Taking control, Bravery	Quick, Open, Honest, Comprehensive	CEO
R5/1	Vehicle defect	Disengage, Legalistic	Active response, Quick, Comprehensive info	CEO
R5/2	Vehicle defect	Absence, defensive	Unprepared, Slow Response, No credibility	CEO
R6/1	Finance Issue	Acknowledgement	Prepared, Quick response, Open, Transparent	CEO
R7/1	Mining Rights Issue	Legalistic, Proactive, Build relationships	Quick response, Active response, Open and Transparent	PR Practitioner
R7/2	Employee legal action	Legalistic, disengage, cover up, cold and formal	Slow Response, Closed	CEO
R8/1	Death of Executives	Acknowledgement, Communicate essential information	Slow response, Credible, Absence	Group CEO

R8/2	Operating License suspension	Proactive	Quick response, Active response	Heads of Communications
R8/3	Social Media crisis	Apologetic	Quick response, Active response	CEO
R9/1	Mining Rights issue	Absence, Reactive	Absence, Slow response	CEO
R9/2	Vehicle recall	Absence	Unapologetic, No restitution, Absence	CEO
R10/1	Food Poisoning	Absence, Cold, Legalistic	No restitution, Absence, No responsibility	CEO
R10/2	Plane lost engine	Initial absence then Proactive engagement	Open, Controlling	CEO
R11/1	Food Poisoning	Acknowledge, Assuming responsibility	Quick response, Open, Honest, Controlling	CEO
	Food Poisoning	Absence, Legalistic, Cover-up	Absence, No responsibility, Slow response	CEO
R12/1	Industrial Explosion	Absence, legalistic	Slow response, Controlling	Head of Communications
R13/1	Food Poisoning	Defensive	No empathy, Unprepared	Corporate Relations Manager
R14/1	Fatalities	Absence, legalistic	Slow response, Empathetic	CEO

9.11. Appendix L: 10 Lessons Learnt from the 24/7 reputation cycle

Lesson	Learning
1	Say it all and say it fast
2	Stay ahead of the 24-hour news cycle
3	The best antidote to fake news is independent, expert commentary
4	Correct, accurate, reporting vigorously
5	Prioritise audiences and tailor communications accordingly
6	Use all communications platforms available to get messages out
7	Review and pause marketing campaigns
8	Avoid standard operational downtime
9	Ensure strong one-on-one relationships with important stakeholders
10	Listen and adjust your message

Reference: Respondent 6: (AtmosphereComms, 2018)

9.12. Appendix M: Reputation Resilience

REPUTATION RESILIENCE

STAKEHOLDERS
(Internal / External)

- Index
- Insight
- Report
- Research

Why does Sasol matter?

- Pro-active scenarios
- Holding statements
- Process flows
- Owners committees

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP
PLATFORMS

CRISIS PRO-ACTIVE
MITIGATION

How does Sasol add value??

Creating protective barrier

CLIENT

SHARED VALUE

VISUAL I.D.

COMMUNITY

Social Media

BANK
OF
GOODWILL
+
MITIGATION
MEASURES

= EFFECTIVE CRISIS
MANAGEMENT

Comes from
Reputation Resilience

Reference: Sketches from Respondent 6

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