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COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AS A BASIS FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT  
INCLUDING USE OF THE INTERNET AS A DELIVERY PLATFORM

by

GORDON A. HARRISON

Under the Direction of George Pullman

ABSTRACT

Eighty per cent of small companies without a comprehensive crisis plan vanish within two years of suffering a major disaster—a remarkable and ominous statistic. Crises are occurring more often in all organizations, and when they occur, they are leaving a wake of financial, operational, and reputational damage. Why this trend, now? There are five important reasons: 1) a more volatile workplace involving financial, legal, or management issues within the organization; 2) an *extreme* production mentality often obscuring the conditions under which crises might otherwise be recognized, addressed, or mitigated; 3) enhanced technological platforms for information delivery, such as the Internet, generating a *revolving information door* thus promoting organizational stress and crisis; 4) fast-paced and invasive journalism practices that eliminate invisibility for decisionmaking or reaction; and, 5) lack of strategic planning for crisis. There is an increasing body of evidence suggesting that crises in an organizational environment, whether created by act-of-God or manmade circumstances, have defined and predictable characteristics often relating to communication problems in the discourse community.

It is also evident that solutions exist to reduce the incidence and the intensity of crisis within this discourse community. Approaches include organizational

vulnerability assessments, messaging strategies, forensic media tactics, and dedicated efforts to build relationships with important stakeholders.

Each of these has as its foundation a vigorous strategic communication plan. Crisis plans are necessary in today's business environment, and effective communication is an essential element of any crisis plan. This dissertation will focus on communication methodology as a means of crisis avoidance and crisis mitigation.

**INDEX WORDS:** Crisis, Crisis Management, Crisis Communication, Hostile Media, Organizational Dynamics, Crisis Strategy. University Crises, Corporate Crises, Georgia State University, PhD, Doctorate, Dissertation.

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GORDON A. HARRISON

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2005

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Gordon Alan Harrison  
2005

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AS A BASIS FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT  
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by

GORDON ALAN HARRISON

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My acknowledgement to Kennesaw State University with consideration that a PhD examination of organizational crisis and discourse community collapse would have escaped me but for my tenure at KSU. At Crisis U., I have seen it all.

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I am not certain why I did this at all. I suppose I just wanted my kids to be proud of their dad in the midst of a challenging period in our lives. Thanks Jessica, Amy, and Katherine for hanging with me. I love you always.

## Dedication

---

This dissertation is dedicated to two individuals eternally important to me—my best friend and wife Frances and my remarkable friend, poet Sam Hamill. Sam, your poems give me perspective and help me to appreciate the good things around me. We are two of a kind, looking to the river for peace. I hope our paths cross someday near the Yangtze. Namaste.

And to Frances, it is indeed our time.

*Like the river  
and its banks  
we are two islands  
forging a course  
in the center.*



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## CHAPTER I: DISSERTATION OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS & METHODOLOGY

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*Lying in hammocks, we speak so solemnly of distant thunder, distant rain  
–Issa, translated by Sam Hamill*

### *Statement of Concept*

Research in the field of crisis management suggests that crisis planning has the potential to reduce the incidence and the intensity of crisis. Crisis planning strategies can be applicable to most organizations, including private companies, non-profits, and higher educational institutions. Crisis planning methodology includes:

- a. Specialized messaging to multiple stakeholders;
- b. Communications strategies involving the discourse community;
- c. Crisis forecasting and crisis prevention strategies;
- d. Formation of crisis management teams;
- e. Vertical and horizontal organizational strategy, including the relative positioning and influence of the chief communications officer;
- f. Use of the Internet in crisis communication and crisis management.

The greatest barrier to these strategies seems to be the unwillingness of management executives to, first, recognize the new information landscape that has created a business environment increasing the frequency and intensity of crisis; and, second, to devote time, energy, and money in the task of crisis planning.

In today's volatile business environment, the failure to make this investment is extremely risky and may set the stage for catastrophic damages to the organization's

financial base, its reputation, its production, or other important areas of activity. The following are specific objectives I hope to accomplish in this dissertation:

- **Dissertation Objective 1: Description of the Field of Crisis Management:** It is my intention to describe the history of crisis management and its relative position within more understood areas of management, media, and organizational dynamics. This part of the dissertation will show the context in which crisis management and crisis communication are affected by communications, journalism, marketing, rhetoric, public relations, and other fields of study.
- **Dissertation Objective 2: Crisis Management and Crisis Communication Strategy.** An organizational crisis management plan has several features that transcend the size or the type of organization, number of employees, number of divisions, or the volume of sales. This section of the dissertation will include a discussion of short-term and long-term messaging strategies, the implementation of structural functions such as crisis management teams and crisis assessment functions, and a proactive management plan for vulnerability analysis and improving relationships with stakeholders. Additionally, this section will suggest a relationship between an organization's discourse community and its ability to deal with crises. In this context, the dissertation will offer vertical and horizontal communication strategies that have both internal and external implications for organizational efficiency. This section

will also suggest concepts of crisis-media and crisis management plans consistent with currently accepted research.

- **Dissertation Objective 3: Use of Web as a Delivery Platform for Long- and Short-term Crisis Management Strategy:** Many organizations, especially large technological corporations, are routinely using the Internet as a primary method of communication in crisis strategies. As part of this dissertation, I intend to show examples of the employment of the Internet for crisis management and offer a conceptual strategy for using the Internet as a delivery platform in various organizations.

#### *Research questions*

The following questions are relevant to this discussion.

1. By definition, what is a crisis?
2. What are some existing strategies for organizational crisis management?  
What might be considered as an alternative or alternatives for these strategies?
3. How can technology play a role in crisis management and communication?
4. What are some existing strategies for communication during the various stages of crisis?
5. In crisis management, what type of planning should organizations administer when things are running smoothly and no crisis exists?
6. What is a crisis management team (CMT)? Who should be on the team?  
What role does a CMT play before, during, and after a crisis?

7. What type of organization can benefit from crisis preparation? Is crisis planning restrictive to large organizations?
8. Can crises be forecasted?
9. What are current crisis communication strategies to multiple publics that recognize increased access to organizations because of intensified media scrutiny, access via the Internet, and other information platforms?
10. What is the influence of communication within the hierarchy of an organization?
11. What are examples of communication issues within an organization in the context of current technology?
12. What role does communication play in the culture of an organization and how does the culture of an organization influence the potential for a crisis? (Organizational culture in this sense reflects both the internal and external discourse communities).
13. What role does the communication officer play in the overall context of an organization and in crisis management?
14. Is there a role for the Web in crisis management?
15. When a crisis occurs, how can the damage be mitigated or minimized?

### *Methodology*

The qualitative methodology I will use to develop responses and conclusions to my hypothesis include the following:



1. Case study analysis. Many case studies examine issues of crisis management. My objective is to review a spectrum of case study work to show how organizations handle crisis management.
2. Literature review. Using selected key words noted in this proposal, I will review a variety of books and scholarly journal articles with the intent to evaluate current academic thought on communication policy and crisis management.
3. Empirical research reviews. There are a number of empirical studies by scholars on a variety of subjects involving crisis management, organizational dynamics, crisis communication, and using the Internet as a crisis management platform. I will use these studies in my examination of the subject matter. Also, as part of my PhD course work, I have conducted one empirical research project on the subject of crisis communication policy and organizational dynamics. In my research, I sent survey forms to corporate leaders, higher education institution chief communication officers, and journalists seeking information from them on their use or potential use of the Web as a delivery or inquiry platform for crisis information. I intend to glean information from this project and to use other empirical research projects as necessary and appropriate.
4. Personal Interviews. I intend to use a study included as part of my research involving personal interviews with several individuals in the corporate and non-profit organization sectors, and also discussions with

journalists who write for various publications in Atlanta and the region.

Portions of these interviews are included in the Appendices.

### *Summary*

Planning for crisis presents two interrelated opportunities for organizations of all kinds. First, an organization that develops strategic plans for crisis does a better job of handling crisis events when they occur. This increased efficiency often offers the potential of reducing the duration of a crisis, the overall financial impact, and the potential reputational damage to the organization.

Second, by planning for crisis, research shows, organizations become more efficient in their overall operations. Vulnerability analysis, examination of stakeholder messaging, and a dedication to the development of critical relationships represent a proactive approach to crisis planning, but these strategies also make an organization more competent in production, communication, and administration.

This dissertation presents more questions than answers, with much research remaining to be performed. When the hypothesis essentially takes the position that we will look at predictive strategies for events that may or may not happen using experimental methodologies, then conclusions are at best tenuous.

Having said this, it is my hope that by presenting a variety of scholarly conclusions and bringing into the discussion accepted best practices in organizational dynamics, media and public relations, advertising, and other disciplines, I make a compelling case for my conclusions.

## CHAPTER II: CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN CONTEXT

---

### *Part I: Modern Definition of Crisis*

Definitions of crisis are plentiful in the scholarly descriptions of organizational management. “Crises arise when there is a major incongruence between the expectation of a corporation and what happens in the environment” (Egelhoff and Sen 443). Pearson and Clair defined crisis as, “Highly ambiguous events that necessitate a decision or judgment that will result in change for better or worse” (60). Fink defined crisis as, “A situation that has reached a critical phase. A crisis is an unstable time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending—either one with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome or one with the distinct possibility of a highly desirable and extremely positive outcome” (15). Burnett concluded that a crisis is composed of, “A continuum, beginning with an incident, followed by a conflict, and ending with a crisis, the most serious form of disruption” (476). Shrivastava and Mitroff wrote, “Crises are caused by the simultaneous interaction of failures inside corporations and in their environments” (1987 6). Penrose wrote, “A crisis occurs when an event increases in intensity, falls under close scrutiny of the news media or government, interferes with normal business operations, devalues a positive public image, and has an adverse effect on a business’s bottom line” (156).

Shrivastava, Mitroff, Miller, and Miglani’s definition provided a more comprehensive description of crisis:

“Crises are caused by two interacting sets of failures. Inside organizations, a complex set of Human, Organizational, and Technological (HOT) factors lead to the triggering event. These in turn, interact with Regulatory, Infrastructural, and Preparedness (RIP) failures in the organizations’ environments. Human factors include operator and managerial errors, purposive acts such as sabotage and terrorist attacks or acts of war. Organizational factors include policy failures, inadequate resource allocations for safety, strategic pressures that allow managers to overlook hazardous practices and conditions, communication failures, misperceptions of the extent and nature of hazards, inadequate emergency plans, and cost pressures which curtail safety (Miller and Freisen, 1980; Miller and Freisen, 1984; Turner, 1978). Technological systemic factors include faulty design, defective equipment, contaminated or defective materials and supplies, and faulty technical procedures (Perrow, 1984). Crises may also be triggered by acts of nature such as floods, earthquakes, lightning, tornadoes, *etc.*” (1988 290).

A common theme in these definitions is that a crisis is not an event; rather it results from an event. “The word crisis evolved from the Greek word “krisis” indicating a “turning-point of a disease” (Millar & Heath 153). This early definition serves as a basis for concepts in modern day organization crisis management.

The crisis may result from a hurricane, a legal scandal, an accounting miscalculation, a fire, the death of a stakeholder, or any one of an almost infinite

combination of incidents that might affect an organization. Sometimes the event is known only to employees of an organization, and if contained, is invisible to outsiders, perhaps even to stakeholders such as stockholders, trustees, or board members. If not contained by actions of management, or if circumstances out of the control of management escalate a crisis event out of obscurity, it can become evident to individuals or groups that are not stakeholders, or in worse cases, the entire world.

On the other hand, some crisis events are immediately known as catastrophic to even the casual observer. Clearly, crisis management takes a different form in these circumstances. When these types of events occur, outsiders often judge the handling and messaging aspects differently than those caused by man.

A number of scholars point to varying perceptions of organizations undergoing crisis based on their reputations, both human and corporate. Sympathy by the public or other stakeholders can become a significant factor. Even the handling of past crises weigh in on public perception and whether the crisis is a blip on the map or earthshaking. Coombs (2004) wrote, “Specifically, SCCT [Situational Crisis Communication Theory] suggests that the information about past crises can shape perceptions of the current crisis, the reputational threat presented by the current crisis, and, hence, should guide the optimal communication responses for protecting the organizational reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002)” (266). He concluded, “Results showed a direct, negative relationship between crisis history and organizational reputation” (284). In other words, if an organization has one crisis, the next one that occurs with a similar theme will be more negatively received than the first by stakeholders.

A second commonality in the examination of crises is that a crisis event by its very nature is unpredictable. Seeger refers to organizational crisis as, “Specific, unexpected and non-routine” (332), and, agreeing with Sellnow et al, “Making accurate predictions about the risk associated with a crisis, particularly when systems are behaving in chaotic ways, may simply be impossible.” (332). I interpret Seeger’s discussion of crisis planning to be that crises approach so suddenly that the possibility exists planning will only worsen a situation because management may take a predetermined programmed course of action, perhaps steering the organization directly into conflict instead of avoiding it (329-337). Seeger’s “Chaos Theory” of crisis management emphasizes the lack of predictability in system behavior, unexpected and non-linear interactions between components, suggesting that a crisis not only is a function of the organization’s discourse community, but also dependent upon other factors such as reputation, prior behavior and the commonality and community of the organization (329-337).

Crisis is often defined by the type and intensity of an event. We can discuss human failings, technological breakdowns, non-human errors and acts of God, or levels of crises based on the level of scrutiny. When government regulators or the media are involved, the stakes usually go up. When stakeholders are involved, likewise the issues become larger.

Thus, scholars and practitioners characterize crises in many ways, often with the definition emanating from personal perspective, the causal elements of crisis, or a specific type of examination of crisis. My definition of crisis, that I believe reflects

valid ideas from a number of scholars, concentrates on a defining event with subsequent phases of decision-making and a period of action.

*A crisis is a critical period following an event that might negatively affect an organization in which decisions have to be made that will affect the bottom line of an organization. It is a time of exploration requiring rapid processing of information and decisive action to attempt to minimize harm to the organization and to make the most of a potentially damaging situation.*

This definition is in keeping with Egelhoff and Sen that an event is described as being something out of the ordinary. It also resembles Penrose's, Pearson and Clair's, and Fink's definition in emphasizing the need for decisionmaking within a window of opportunity. Likewise, it implicitly observes that something has gone wrong, perhaps a system failure within an organization—as noted by Shrivastava and Mitroff. However, the collective reasoning of these and other scholars, resident in my definition, is that an event has happened, decisions have to be made, and actions must be taken.

### *Crisis Communication*

If we accept the above definition of crisis as reasonable, then crisis communication might be explained simply as the act of *messaging* during and after a crisis event. That is not quite right; at least it does not encompass the wide range of issues that confront administrators in a crisis management strategy. My research leads me to believe that *communication represents the very heart of crisis*

*management and that it is an ongoing, long-term process involving a range of organizational dynamics and management functions.* As Ogrizek and Guillery reasoned, “Crisis management and crisis communication are very tightly interwoven. In addition, the complex nature of a crisis process includes, to a certain extent, corporate communication itself. As Joseph Scanlon (1975) quite rightly emphasizes: ‘Every crisis is also a crisis of information...Failure to control this crisis of information results in failure to control the crisis’” (xi).

This reasoning is derived from several concepts that are often discussed in this dissertation. First, from the perspective of the *discourse community* (See Appendix 4, Key Words and Definitions, #11), it is well documented in anecdotal evidence that an organization determined to be efficient and effective in its messaging fares better in diminishing the incidence and the duration of crisis (Egelhoff and Sen 446, 448, 454, 463). This is clearly a function of the organization requiring planning, skill and excellent communication methodology.

Second, research shows that the incidence and duration of crisis is lessened when an organization has positive and productive prior relationships with important stakeholders, “If organizations are going to be successful, they need to look beyond just their stockholders and expand their critical relationships” (Ulmer 591). These relationships are often established through a well-defined public relations plan with specific objectives involving the establishment of strategic relationships, upon which communication is a key element.

Finally, in full crisis mode in an organization, research shows that communication is an important factor in getting through the difficult and complex



acute crisis period, and is a significant critical factor in crisis planning. In effect, while much of crisis planning is formula driven, reactive, and an extremely ambiguous time for an organization, excellent communication helps the organization meet crisis objectives, and poor communication makes the crisis more dangerous and damaging to the organization.

The *health and culture* of an organization prior to the crisis event therefore can relate to the financial situation, management, production orientation, or some other function of organizational design. Wise examined the issues of corporate culture, crisis communication, and crisis management, and concluded:

“Too many managers treat crisis communication plans as a simple and singular solution to a crisis, and that other variables such as communication culture—were better predictors of how well an organizations manages a crisis... Throughout the prevailing contemporary literature, attitudes place corporate culture as the main factor in affecting crisis outcome” (Wise 463).

Wise notes, in discussing the work of Penrose, Rondeau & Wagar, Grunig, Grunig & Dozier and others, that successful crisis planning involves examination and action relating to organizational discourse, messaging, and communication. I interpret this to mean that messaging is important in passing important information, however; communication is vital to an organization in both crisis and routine periods.

## CHAPTER II: CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN CONTEXT

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### *Part II: Changes in the Information Landscape*

Statistics are staggering relative to crisis in American corporate organizations, “89% of responding Fortune 500 CEO’s agreed that ‘a crisis in business today is as inevitable as death and taxes,’ but fully 50%...admitted that they do not have a prepared crisis management plan,” (Fink 67). Fink also found, “Of those companies that reported having had a crisis in the past, 42% *still* do not have any sort of crisis management plan in the event another crisis hits...overall there was a general consensus among *all* respondents that their companies are at least somewhat vulnerable to the following types of crises: industrial accidents, environmental problems, union problems/strikes, product recalls, investor relations, hostile takeovers, proxy fights, rumors/media leaks, government regulatory problems, acts of terrorism or embezzlement”(67, 68).

Researchers (Fink, Egelhoff & Sen, Penrose, and others) tend to examine big business for data. Finding crisis case studies on AT&T, Microsoft, Exxon and other huge multinationals is easy—and they have numerous crises. Likewise, the word “crisis” conjures for most people images of natural disaster or financial scandals like the collapse of the savings and loan industry. If you asked a local shop owner what crises come to mind, he might suggest the bombing of the World Trade Center, the December 2004 tsunami, and the war in Iraq. If you asked a local corporate executive the same question, he might list the top corporate crises since the turn of the century such as the Enron financial scandal, Martha Stewart’s trial, or perhaps the

antitrust litigation against Microsoft, if he could remember that far back. What then would the average American say was the most important *religious* crisis in the past few years, *sports* crisis, *political* crisis, *environmental* crisis?

Unless you were directly affected, few would mention the warehouse fire at the Acworth, Georgia, Tip Top Sock Manufacturing Company in 1990, or the e-coli contamination at White Water Amusement Park in Marietta, Georgia in 1996, or the shooting at the Kennesaw, Georgia Town Center Quality Inn in 2003. Most of us can recall *troublesome* events in schools, corporations, universities, and non-profits over the past dozen years that have caught the eye of the media (which is mostly why we can remember them). However, most people do not tend to classify these events as “crises.” They are “tragedies,” “accidents,” “scandals,” or any one of a dozen other nouns denoting challenging times and events. Including those directly involved, few would consider these events as being self-contained with a beginning, an end, and an identifiable succession of events in the middle, even though they might be random and chaotic to the casual observer. My conclusion, after reading Fink’s and other researcher’s statistics is that we are a society in denial of crisis, mostly without an understanding of crisis cause and effect.

Crisis events are the rule and not the exception of modern day communication departments and executive organizational dynamics because of the changing landscape of organizational dynamics and information delivery. Potential crises lie in wait for every manager and every employee of every organization.

Recently I had the opportunity to be in Beijing and Nanchang PRC to present a training seminar on crisis management to about 60 mid-career executives. Some

were officials of the prefecture governments, some were managers in the Chinese National government, a few were Communist party officials, and a few were business executives, whose participation became available only very recently in China, once solely a Communistic society.

This visit was instructive in my research not so much because these were Chinese. The participants were highly educated public servants intent on performing their jobs and being productive citizens, very much like their counterparts elsewhere in the world. However, it was important to me to be able to introduce the concept of crisis management to a set of individuals who admittedly had never before considered the methodology of crisis as a discipline.

Of course, they had crisis events occur perhaps as often as executives in other nations did. Like American executives, their posture was usually reactive and not proactive. Notwithstanding the fact that the media is not nearly the formidable power in China as in the West, the chain of events of crisis is the same, and in fact, the public pressure for accountability is very similar. I presented the participants with a set of inquiries concerning their own organizations. Then we set about to examine their organizations from the perspective of crisis management.

The purpose of these exercises was not to seek empirical data, however; it was instructive for me to observe the participants work through a progression of crisis management case studies and to note the evolution of the executives' thinking as the training seminar advanced. In the initial stages, their thoughts were that because media is extremely limited in the PRC, their organizations were mostly inoculated from the same pressures as in the United States.

As the Chinese put on the hats of a crisis management team, it became evident that the practical application of crisis management examinations achieved results. They relished the idea of plowing through the topics in their organizations to identify priorities and seek solutions. After several case study exercises using their own crises, their thought process became more systematic in approaching crisis prevention and crisis mitigation.

For example, one Chinese executive was a director with the Bureau of Dams in Nanchang. Nanchang is a large metropolitan city on the banks of the Gan Jiang River with numerous lakes in the area, many formed by dams. Travel in and around Nanchang will reveal a countryside with hundreds of rice paddies, fishing ponds and recreational lakes, all the result of dams off tributaries to the river. The director of the Bureau of Dams in Nanchang is a busy man.

This Director had many struggles with dam maintenance, especially since most of the dams were earthen structures built decades and perhaps centuries ago. He occasionally encountered dam breaks, sometimes with loss of life and property. In our assessment, he addressed chain of authority during a dam break, notification of family members, public response, emergency response, liaison to emergency officials, liaison to non-emergency officials and more. He looked at types of dam breaks given certain circumstances and response to government officials relative to organizational responsibilities. He said that he and his staff had always dealt with these issues. It was in fact their primary work assignment. However, they had never systematically planned for crisis using a crisis management plan and a formula-driven approach (much like most American executives).

My interest here is not to comment on Chinese management techniques, rather to suggest that the avoidance of commonly accepted crisis strategy seems to be human nature, and not an ideological or cultural phenomenon. Executives apparently chart their existence for production and profiteering, not planning for crisis.

### *Information Flow and the Media*

Several persistent elements create the need for managers to better understand and adopt principles of crisis. These include changing patterns and speed of information flow, changing organizational dynamics, more volatile financial markets caused by greater stakeholder access to information, and societal changes, including a public that demands more information. All of these are related to the volume and speed of information to which we are all accustomed and that are consistently present in the modern work environment. Individually and collectively, these elements require that modern managers adopt a different set of operating principles as managers in the past.

Two thousand years ago, information dissemination was word of mouth. Populations in different nations scarcely knew of each other, thus intercontinental discourse was through trade excursions delivered by sailors and an occasional participant in academic or business interaction. Two hundred years ago, it took days to get information from New York to San Francisco by horse drawn mail wagons. A hundred years ago it took hours, using telegraph, and even then the information was not widely dispersed. Today the information flow is instantaneous and it instantaneously blankets the population.

In the recent past, three networks determined what the public saw on the evening news in a sixty-minute time slot. Now, the networks are often trying to catch up with the cable networks when events happen—whether they are in New York or in Baghdad. We traverse global news with our fingertips using the Web, on a hundred cable channels, and through a dozen types of media hitting at us throughout the day. What then characterizes a crisis? Is it simply what the media mass displays in our various information platforms, or is it something more methodical, identifiable with a systematic process and life cycle?

The current media adventures of Congressman Tom Delay come immediately to mind. Delay is the Majority Leader of the United States House of Representatives and is the whipping boy of the liberals and the poster child of the conservatives. No matter what he says or does, he is the fodder of many types of media.

Delay is being tormented on a number of issues. Some would say he brings the attention on himself by becoming embroiled in so many controversial political issues and taking hard-line stands that even members of his own political party would probably pass on. It is doubtful his transgressions are any more or less serious than countless other politicians of the past 50 years. Yet societal changes, technology, and instantaneous information flow will probably form enough “mass” to insure either his fall from prominence or at least to diminish his importance in the political arena. He may simply not be able to withstand the pressure from all the media sources.

These media-induced phenomena happen to people and organizations on a daily basis. It happened to Senator Trent Lott in his quest to be Majority Leader of the Senate with his infamous statements on racialism in the South, to Speaker Newt

Gingrich with his righteous incriminations of the left wing, while at the same time participating in a marriage-ruining affair, and to Monica Lewinski-plagued President Bill Clinton. It happened to Martha Stewart (see Chapter 2: Part 3), to Harvard President Lawrence Summers with his statements on gender diversity, to Ken Lay, the infamous President of Enron with his financial transgressions, to Supreme Court justice nominee Robert Bork, on accusations of his right-wing leanings, and it is happening as I write to Atlanta-Fulton County Sheriff Myron Freeman in the wake of the tragic courthouse shootings in Atlanta, and it may have even happened to former Iraq President Saddam Hussein in his downfall. It is an often-asked question as to why Saddam was targeted by the U.S. government instead of a host of other despots across the globe. Was he responsible for his own demise by creating so much media-hype that he was the logical choice for extermination as opposed to the next dictator down the road?

Executives must learn to contend with crisis events and the power of information delivery platforms. Once the information platforms are moving and there are stakeholders (antagonists or protagonists) willing to carry the cause, the momentum is hard to stop and there are few places to hide. It is an age-old quandary for public figures immensely sped up and significantly enhanced with modern day information delivery. It is almost as if the story develops as much of a life as the crisis itself for the “victim.”

Consider the case of Richard Jewell, the first accused perpetrator in the Centennial Park bombing in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. Later to be completely vindicated when the true perpetrator was found, Jewell endured relentless media



attention for months. He lost his job, his family doubted his veracity, and his friends deserted him as a zealot and a murderer. Yet the world media relentlessly hounded him in the face of literally no evidence. This is the type of environment that is created when there is virtually no accountability from journalists and their “everything-to-gain-and nothing-to-lose-mentality.”

These may seem like entirely distinct issues from those involving the speed and intensity of information patterns surrounding business or other organizations and the media. They may also sound like an ethical issue important only from the perspective of a journalist. In fact, my research shows that these new elements in the modern workplace need to be considered and dealt with in crisis planning. The interaction of the media and the speed of communication represent a paradigm in the new information landscape that affects most organizations in their lifetime.

The importance of the array of information platforms and speed of information flow in the modern world cannot be overstated in terms of the frequency and the intensity of a crisis. Some might immediately consider journalistic and media coverage as the single most important element that creates crisis events, but this is only part of the story. Stakeholders and the public have instantaneous access now where once they did not. Whether we are talking about acts-of-God-type crisis events, financial corruption, corporate profit losses, or any other type of “crisis,” people know about it immediately and they react. The time span between a crisis event and the outside response may be considered as a window of opportunity. However, it is also represents that short period existing before the event finds public

attention. And when the world knows about it, there can be considerable consequence, most of it bad.

I have had reporters dream up very inventive angles on even the most mundane topics. For example, as the Chief Administrative Officer for the House of Representatives, my office created a more efficient Website that allowed easier user interface and more data flow to the public. Instead of accolades on increased usability, reporters swamped my office asking who paid for it and how much it cost, suggesting that the Website was politically motivated. The reality and opportunities of a better Website was lost as reporters dreamed up titillating fodder for their articles that would be a flash-in-the-pan column on government waste. The ultimate insult of this instance was that I had greater access to and from the media in mind with the new Website design and function. All the press could think about was political expediency.

Accelerated information exchange and aggressive journalists necessitate different approaches to management by people in the work environment. Crisis events are the rule and not the exception of modern day communication departments and executive organizational dynamics. Potential crises lay on the desk of every manager and every employee of every organization in the nation. When a call from the media comes on an issue concerning your organization (or you as an executive), your employees or your organization, preparation is better than remediation—and it is a prerequisite for crisis management. One way of preparing for a call is to know to whom you are talking.

For example, as a VP of a university, I received a call from a reporter from one of Atlanta's weekly free newspapers called *Creative Loafing* concerning an issue involving some litigation against the institution. The reporter threw me off guard when he said he had known me in the past and that we had shared similar experiences, including going to the same university.

Typically, I am very aware of what I say to reporters, especially those with whom I have no apparent prior relationship. However, this reporter immediately developed a friendly demeanor with me, and I felt that I could trust him. The result was that I gave him information "off the record" that I felt would help him better understand my on-the-record comments. After about an hour of interview, we concluded the conversation. I momentarily felt a little queasy over the interview, but again referred back to my instinct that the reporter was someone I could trust and someone with whom I could be candid.

It was an erroneous assumption. In the next edition of *Creative Loafing*, the reporter not only included my background comments, he used my casual tone against me. I had been taken for a long ride with a reporter who knew how to get me to talk. It was a bad mistake I was not to make again. Not only did we hurt our legal case, our stakeholders were furious with me, and I was angry with myself for making such a novice mistake. A prior relationship with this reporter would have better prepared me, and reduced the chances of a damaging conversation.

Knowing the journalists who report on you and your organization is a necessary strategy in crisis management and crisis communication. "It's vital for PR people to build relationships with journalists and analysts but it is also important for

company executives to develop these relationships. Once the executive is well founded in dealing with the press and analysts, there is no such thing as off the record.” (Marken 28).

Before dealing with reporters now, if I am not acquainted with them already, I always perform a little background work. What is their style? Are they hostile to their interviewees in newspaper copy? Do they have an ax to grind? Relationship building with the media should be part of any crisis management plan. The plan should incorporate strategic examination of publishers, reporters, writing styles and previous behavior as well as tracking of successful and unsuccessful media experiences. I have developed a sample media plan as part of this dissertation that suggests methods of adapting to various types of journalists and media organizations (Chapter III).

Hostile and aggressive reporters working for modern news outlets represent the delivery platform for the changed media landscape in the modern day business world. However, journalists and news delivery outlets do not perform their functions in a vacuum. The public wants and even demands more information and there is an ever-spiraling flow to and from journalists.

The implications of establishing a strategic media plan to address these issues cannot be overstated. In my opinion, the desire to sell media is often more important than the desire to produce quality reporting. Reporting has become forensic and pervasive. Reporters who want to become the next Bob Woodward are frantic to write exciting copy for print and broadcast media, and fight for every morsel of shelf space in the ever-enlarging store of media. If the story does not have an angle to

pique the public's collective interest, journalists feel compelled to invent one. Berry noted that some journalistic organizations denounce objectivity in reporting as "worse than useless, even harmful" (15). He noted, "Other critics subscribe to Overholser's belief that objectivity 'often produces a report bound in rigid orthodoxy, a deplorably narrow product of conventional thinking,' in which officialdom is given too much legitimacy and the voices of others given too little" (15). However prominent this viewpoint is, the consequence of such a mentality is, as Berry notes, "Devil-may-care bloggers and the facts-be-damned TV cable shout fests" (15). Add newspaper and other types of journalists to the list of potentially subjective journalists, and a climate is created for media crisis in every organization.

Crises are not simply a matter of negative news media and aggressive reporting. Fast moving and sometimes uncontrollable information flow can erratically influence the financial balance of an organization. Stocks and financial portfolios are volatile and reactive. It does not take long for stockholders, banks and other ancillary financial organizations to become nervous when real or perceived crisis events strike. If there is not a direct impact on the bottom line of the operation, by the time the media, stockholders, or regulatory groups have gotten their hands on it, the price of the stock will have taken a hit; law enforcement is on your front doorstep; the public will be staying away from your store; or worse, Nightline is on the telephone for an interview.

### *Historical Notes on Crisis*

My research leads me to conclude that the crisis management discipline is arguably thirty years old, give or take a few years. Its origin is linked to technology enhancements relating not only to the ability of and the speed with which the consumer and public receive information but also the effects of advanced technology in the modern business environment. Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer noted, “Technology introduces new variables and is often so tightly coupled that a change in one part of a system can have unforeseen consequences in another” (50). Thus, technology enhancements, while permanently integrated into the workplace, foster an environment beset by an increased flow of information, and an organization sometimes teetering on instability because of its intrinsic technology strength. Crisis management became important with the confluence of increased communication speed and volume, a society consumed with information technology, and a world population seemingly captivated with scandal and crisis.

My research on the historical aspects of crisis indicated a rise in the incidence and severity of crisis as information technology became more sophisticated. As the speed of the flow of information increased, so did the issues of crisis management. Each technological innovation added to the flow of communication, thus enhancing the ability of the public to gather information and become part of the chain of events.

### *Organizational Context*

What role does communication play in a crisis? In many instances, dealing with a crisis is strictly a reactive posture, occurring when some devilish event puts

that organization at risk. It would seem that given the attention media gives crises, recognizing the financial and other consequences that might occur because of a crisis, managers would develop better planning processes. However, statistics show that organizations are busy doing whatever they do and seldom consider the evils that might befall them. Egelhoff and Sen wrote, "The incidence of corporate crises is increasing at an alarming rate. A recent survey of 114 of the Fortune 1000 companies found such large companies now face, on average 10 major crises per year" (Egelhoff & Sen 443). Penrose reported that "About 40% of Fortune 1000 industrial companies still do not have an operational crisis plan and that smaller, lesser-known companies must heed the fact that 80% of companies without a comprehensive crisis plan vanish within 2 years of suffering a major disaster" (Penrose 155). These are remarkable statistics and should instigate self-analysis by all organizations.

The retirement of the manager of the local Macy's store is probably not a crisis to the public, but it is assuredly sets up an important strategic process for corporate management. Decisions that followed would substantially influence the profits of that particular store. My definition of crisis works well here. *It is an event requiring decisive action upon which much depends.*

Was there a plan to allow an efficient transfer of power to a new manager? Did he or she leave the store in good order? Was there a plan for media coverage of the new President to grab a tiny little opportunity for a market advantage? Did the departing President leave with good feelings? Was there a non-compete clause in his contract? You never know when a competitor will hire this fellow and pit him against you. How did the employees feel about the successor? Was there a plan to

bring employees in on the selection process? Was one of them passed over creating tension in the organization? Who wrote the copy for all of this? Who approved the copy? These are all questions that an effective crisis management plan might address.

The absence of such a strategy, whether or not it is called a crisis plan, leaves important considerations to chance. One of the most vital aspects of crisis planning is the undertaking of a proactive set of actions with the intent of understanding and itemizing potential non-routine situations. “Organizational responses to crisis are most often designed to avoid liability, shift blame, diffuse responsibility, transcend the crisis, bolster image, and, occasionally, to accept blame and compensate victims. Organizations typically focus on getting beyond the crisis with as little cost and disruption as possible” (Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer 50). Once the issues are understood, resources may be devoted to mitigating them or in some cases completely abating their potential to become a problem.

#### *The Discourse Community: Communications with Stakeholders*

Most organizations have a product or service to offer to someone, they have people employed in some type of hierarchical structure, and they have a myriad of stakeholders occupying multiple discourse communities. Within the organizational framework of these organizations is a multitude of divisional structures, including production, sales, human resources, support, and maintenance. Not only does each of these organizations have a confined discourse community, but also each organization exists within a much larger discourse community. The environmental specialists are tied to the regulators, to the neighborhoods, and to the activist groups. Production staff is tied to trade associations, labor groups, professional development



organizations, and educational institutions. Each of the individuals in an organization represents a singular yet linked element of a larger group of individuals that constantly converses with each other.

Because each person and each group of an organization is so intricately tied to internal and external discourse communities, organizations should probe their communication links and orchestrate links with each one. “Organizations cannot evolve and sustain themselves without the support of their larger environments” (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer 66). These are often complicated examinations that in some organizations might well be considered an infringement of personal rights, for example in academic institutions. Therefore, managers might well take special care in preparing employees and other stakeholders for such a plan.

All stakeholders should be included in a strategic plan to communicate with internal and external discourse communities. Who are the stakeholders of an organization that belong to a discourse community? Coombs concluded,

Any person or group that has an interest, right, claim, or ownership in an organization. Stakeholders have been separated into two distinct groups: primary and secondary. Primary stakeholders are those people or groups whose actions can be harmful or beneficial to an organization. Failure to maintain a continuing interaction with a primary stakeholder could result in the failure of the organization. Typical primary stakeholders include employees, investors, customers, suppliers, and the government. Secondary stakeholders or influencers are those people or groups who can affect or be affected by the actions

of an organization. Typical influencers include the media, activist groups, and competitors. Influencers cannot stop an organization from functioning but still can damage an organization (20).

The word *crisis* conjures for most people images of natural disasters or financial scandals, like the collapse of the savings and loan industry. But all organizations have issues confronting them that affect the bottom line and in which the discourse community plays a role in success or failure of a crisis communication strategy. Caillouet and Allen, in their empirical studies on employee interviews with the media during a crisis, found that there is a tendency for employees to be frontline communicators, and outside of the framework of strategic messaging.

“Denouncements, ingratiation and excuses are most likely to occur. Justification, due to an employee’s need to protect his or her self image, is the most likely strategy to occur” (215). Unfortunately, the authors also found that employee personal experiences and perceptions often fall outside of the message desired by management. Behavior such as this exists in every organization. Executives rarely offer such flexibility to employees, especially in crisis, where, unwittingly, corporate messaging can be easily undermined. A strategic plan would be specific in employee expectations during a crisis plan. Not only would the plan serve the purpose of identifying roles and responsibilities of managers and staff in an organization, it would also put on the table reasons for personal accountability during times when discretion is advised. No organization is too small for such consideration.

Egelhoff, analyzing earlier work by Quarantelli, found, “Certain communication and organizational information-processing deficiencies underlie many

studies of disasters and from this he hypothesizes about the problem areas of information flow during crises” (445). Noting research by Galbraith (1977), Egelhoff concluded, “There is empirical evidence that organizations must organize to facilitate information processing between appropriate interdependent subunits if they are to succeed in implementing their strategies or coping with their environments” (448). Marra found, “The underlying communication culture of an organization and the level of autonomy or power of the public relations department within an organization can easily prevent (or enhance) practitioners from implementing the best crisis communication plan.” Further, he noted, “Some organizations encourage two-way communication while others rarely or grudgingly disseminate information to its relevant audiences.” He found agreement with Sriramesh and Grunig, “Culture influences public relations by providing a broad base of worldview, meaning, and values that affect all decisions in the organization, including the choice of a model of public relations” (48).

Kennesaw State University (KSU) is a resident institution in the northern suburbs of Atlanta, with a student population of around 18,000 and an employee population of approximately 1,250. It was originally created as a commuter two year college but local growth and local wealth combined to move the institution more into the mainstream and into becoming a university with a large student and employee population. When I was hired as AVP for External Affairs at the institution, the role of chief communications officer and spokesperson went along with the job.

It was not long after my arrival that I sensed some problems at the university. There was a great deal of media scrutiny and several negative articles written in local

newspapers. I spent what seemed an excessive amount of time in court listening to plaintiffs who were litigating against the institution. Many employees were unhappy and constantly fussing with each other and administrators over what seemed like frivolous issues. I attended a dinner event one evening when a local clinical psychologist noted in passing the number of patients from KSU who needed counseling on coping with work issues. My antennae were appropriately raised after a month on the job.

In the following weeks, I spent time in interviews with my colleagues to find out what was going on. A senior administrator and member of the cabinet declared to me, “We have never been a team and we never will be.” Another said, “You work hard here and nobody cares. You don’t work hard here and nobody cares.” Another pointed fingers at top management as the source of the problem, “They don’t respond to us or include us in their management process.” Still another pointed at a faculty out of control, “They always seem to be out to get us.” My assessment was that the staff felt valueless to management, and management felt the staff was disloyal.

In this organization, there were numerous what I call “gripe sessions” and venues for complaints. There were town hall meetings that always resorted to gripes about the minutiae of management. We had arbitration personnel, legal counsels for racial/gender diversity mediation, for faculty or staff members that were just unhappy with the work environment; we had students and faculty ombudsmen, and we had a ladder that allowed complaints to rise to the top. In this process, staff were brought together to air their complaints. If that failed, it went to another level and then

another. All of these were referred to by staff as a place for future litigants to begin their legal process.

Rather than deal with the debilitating relationship and discourse issues in the organization, top management had *institutionalized* discord. Rather than face hard decisions on where the real problems lay, the fix had come to roost on an unworkable process, built on pointing a finger at others. Much of this had to do with a leadership team seemingly incapable of creating an environment of trust and harmony, however; the most pressing issue was a discourse community that had fallen into serious disrepair. Rather than work on real solutions, management chose to deal with abstractions that only further inflamed the problems. As a result, employees typically felt undervalued and underutilized. Management felt isolated and persecuted. Media, oversight groups and lawyers for the plaintiffs surrounded the campus like vultures looking for scraps. This was, in effect, a crisis breeding ground. I was working at Crisis University!

There are solutions to this type of situation, including an examination of the discourse community for flaws and subsequently taking a strong management approach to solutions. Because the President of the institution was seemingly intent on not “rocking the boat” by taking hard stances, her solutions were seen as unrealistic from both the internal or external members of the community. Meetings with key stakeholders inevitably began with a discussion of the President’s tenure, a discussion I was not interested in pursuing.

Three outcomes were almost guaranteed: first that employee-employer conflict at the University was a routine occurrence; second, when crisis occurred,

employees of the institution were on the frontline vigorously maligning and defaming administrators in a classic case of *warrior mentality* (see definitions in Appendix II); and third, that stakeholders were invariably perceiving problems in management. We had communication problems in all areas of our discourse community.

In keeping with the independent findings of Marra, Sriramesh, Grunig, and others as noted on several occasions in this dissertation, lack of adequate information processing between appropriate interdependent elements of the organization placed the organization in jeopardy of stress and duress. Without the leadership of a skilled administrator willing to take leadership stances and make hard decisions, it was virtually impossible to get the organization on an even keel.

Fortunately, not all organizations have this degree of discord and dysfunction. But all organizations do have multiple discourse communities that significantly influence their ability to function efficiently and that are vital to the production capacity. Organizations that have exemplary vertical and horizontal messaging channels find ways of dealing with the difficult, crisis-producing issues and events in an effective way. The converse of this is that organizations become cannibalistic. Employees and management consume themselves with distrust and disloyalty, questioning decisions by decisionmakers, making clandestine meetings with reporters trying to set the record straight according to their own personal views, and they tend to deal with the environment of dissonance rather than the issues themselves. As a result, the crisis becomes lengthier, more divisive, and more influential to the health of the organization.

My research shows that best practices methodology is dynamic due in part to the fact that crisis management is a function of the flow of information, much of which is discussed in this dissertation. With high-speed communication technology scarcely a decade old, many organizations simply have not had time to develop effective strategies that deal with crisis. When a strategy finally is developed, it can be immediately obsolete as a different type or speed of communication has come along. This is significant complexity in crisis management.

It is within this context that the subject matter of crisis management and crisis communication is examined. An organization is comprised of humans, whose actions or lack of action can solve, lessen, or increase the impact of a crisis. Much the same as a human, an organization is alive with multiple opinions, skills, capabilities, experiences, and knowledge. Guiding that organization on a path of safety in the midst of a crisis event requires very human action. Each action has a reaction. Each time a decision is made, the lives of both people and the organization are affected. Knowing the right decision when the variables keep changing is a difficult and perplexing proposition.

Are the complex issues of organizational management those only of modern day managers? Of course not! As long as humans have been associating for the purpose of commerce, issues of interdependency have challenged productivity.

However, combined with complexities involved with the modern informational landscape, issues of organizational dynamics have been magnified. When access to an from an organization was limited, managers were somewhat free of scrutiny to take whatever measures they deemed appropriate to resolve a problem

and move on with their business. Today, managers must contend with issues of organizational dynamics and the informational landscape as they plan their business strategies. It is within this context that crisis has become more prominent in the landscape, and more potentially devastating to modern businesses.



## CHAPTER II: CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN CONTEXT

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### *Part III: Crisis Communication in Context to Rhetoric*

#### Introduction

My research for this dissertation has primarily involved an examination of literature describing various methodologies of crisis management and crisis communication. While these topics spanned a variety of disciplines in the areas of business, communication, and human behavior, issues of classical rhetoric constantly seemed to find their way into my writing and my thinking. Rhetoric indeed forms an underlying principle of how people communicate with one another in the modern world, in modern business situations, and in crises.

I am not the first researcher to consider the relationship between rhetoric and contemporary communication issues. “I felt as though ancient rhetoric had a great deal of plausible advice for contemporary communicators, be they technical writers, or journalists, or politicians” (Pullman 1). Pullman, a professor at Georgia State University, fumed over the lessening size of his classical rhetoric classes, perhaps even considering the demise of ancient rhetoric (1). His writings and this dissertation intersect, essentially in considering how and if rhetoric still applies to people in modern communications.

Indeed, some scholars believe that crisis management processes create a new organizational environment, one that is more efficient in many contexts. Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer characterize the process as creating, “Fundamentally new knowledge and understanding.” They reasoned,

“In experiencing and making sense of a serious crisis, organizations frequently must communicatively construct a quintessentially new understanding of self, environment, risk, opportunity, markets, stakeholders, products, and technology. This perspective is best described as corporate epistemology or as a way of knowing and coordinating knowledge” (80).

During a crisis, the stakes of decisionmaking increase, nerves of those involved are frayed, and mistakes are costly. In a crisis, communication must be accurate, timely, targeted at specific audiences, and forensic to be effective, whether the messaging is to an internal audience or one of many external discourse communities. All of this often transpires in an environment magnified by scrutiny from a variety of publics, including possibly the media. An understanding of and attention to the fundamentals of rhetoric can be extremely useful in what Bryant refers to as “suasory discourse” (404).

Miller and Heath wrote, “A rhetorical perspective focuses on the meaning that is co-created or is expected of the organization in advance of a crisis, during a crisis, and after a crisis. A rhetorical perspective builds on the premise that the organization needs to look to the quality of its performance as the foundation of its messages that are generated in response to inquiries and implied by the nature of the crisis. Then it needs statements that address the key topics and themes from the perspectives of its stakeholders” (14). While this does not typify action or inaction in all scenarios, a

meaningful statement provides parameters to my discussion on rhetoric. I am convinced of the power of rhetoric in the disciplines of crisis communication.

Yet I approach the relationship between rhetoric and crisis management with some trepidation, and can easily share Pullman's anxiety. While I have found various explicit literature examining this intersection in the works of Millar & Heath, Benoit, Johnson & Sellnow, and even Kent and Taylor in the exploration of "Dialogic Relationships Through the World Wide Web," the subject matter in most scholarly discussion is more often implicit in fusing the two subjects. However; it is clear to me that the very essence of crisis management and crisis communication is the ability to effectively connect with stakeholders individually and collectively, and the key issue always seems to be the efficiency, methodology, and the outcome of this connectivity—clearly within the boundaries of topics in rhetoric. Pursuing the best methodology in this process is vital to the achievement of strategic crisis goals, regardless of the situation and regardless of the players, and these communication processes are assuredly rhetorical in origin.

It is also true a case could be made that rhetoric is similarly intrinsic to marketing, public relations, journalism, psychology or any one of a dozen disciplines of the modern workplace. All involve persuasion, relationship analysis, and communication strategy, writing composition, and other objectives involving human communication and interaction that are clearly essentials of rhetoric. This fact does not diminish my stance that rhetoric and crisis communication intersect; however, it also might give consideration that rhetoric is applicable to all things to all people—an unconvincing argument and a quantum jump I am not willing to make.

Thus, I fear by opening the door into the examination of rhetoric's influence on crisis management, I am inviting scrutiny by scholars far more knowledgeable than I have about the intricacies of the rhetorical discipline. I am aware that classical rhetoric dealt primarily with the speaker addressing a present audience, and contemporary rhetorical theories have to account for organizations addressing multiple and various audiences in different situations. Perhaps this issue alone stretches the boundaries of rhetoric in a way that would produce skepticism in the minds of many scholars. To me however; there is a clear association between the two manifested in modern organizational situations.

In other words, my hope is that this discussion of the relationship between rhetoric and crisis management will not be overshadowed by topics that have been debated for millennia and of which I am neither scholar nor expert. Having said this, I will proceed, with a plea to the reader to understand the appreciation I have for rhetoric and its importance in how executives relate to their audiences in dealing with crisis management.

### *Rhetorical Principles in Organizational Behavior*

Of particular importance in this part will be to discuss communication between a speaker and his audience or, better put, between an organization's management and its stakeholders. In crisis management, this means that either in strategy or execution, management must be able to persuade stakeholders (employees, boards, regulatory agencies, and media) regarding the benefit of the organization during all phases of a crisis.

Crisis communication and crisis management has its ultimate roots in Greek rhetoric, specifically the ideas presented by Aristotle regarding the three methods of proof (Kennedy). Regardless of their lack of knowledge of crisis management in the modern sense, the ancient Greek philosophers, in a collective body of knowledge, addressed fundamental concepts of human behavior, presentation, language, and composition. These are essential elements of organizational dynamics and persuasive strategy relating to crisis management and crisis communication.

A fundamental principle in the field of crisis management is that there are vital and strategic communication methods that help deal with events that can negatively influence an organization. Millar and Heath wrote, “Communication is the process within which social reality is constructed...all social systems are necessarily communication systems and all communication systems are necessarily social systems...humans ‘live *in* communication.’ To say that humans live in communication is to assert that the process per se is formative; what is formed is the shape of our interactions and our meanings about them. The content of the meanings constructed is what we call reality; this content is fundamentally a metaphorical construction” (154). Thus, the assumption is made that social interaction and communication is fabricated using language.

Millar and Heath also examined the use of syllogisms in crisis communication. Their interest was an attempt to position deductive reasoning as an important tool in messaging during the process of crisis administration. “Logical syllogisms depict the relation of contiguity between class and member (Socrates).

Such syllogisms are the indispensable tool of deductive reasoning for they make explicit what is implicit in the class term” (156, 157).

Millar and Heath examined communication in crises and found similarities between the messaging requirements during crisis and principles of rhetoric.

Life is narrative and humans can best be characterized as storytellers who think and live in terms of the stories they tell. Narratives are a way of thinking, a way of ordering the events of the world which would otherwise seem unpredictable or incoherent. As people order the events of their world into meaningful pattern, those patterns do not result in situations where everyone thinks and acts in the same way. Viewed this way, narrative analysis assumes that people choose among competing stories that account for a given event. Thus, the question is often not whether to employ or listen for narrative, but which narrative is best (171)?

The authors speak directly to the connection between rhetorical principles and crisis communication. The messaging should be logical, practical, but most of all targeted at people in a way that evokes sympathy and empathy—in other words a perfect description of the use of *pathos*. While it makes little sense for all communication messaging in the context of crisis management to attempt such a reaction, crisis communicators should be ready to use language to move the audience in their direction when needed and appropriate. In this chapter, I make note of several case studies that reflect examples of positive and negative reactions involving rhetorical principles.

Kent and Taylor found, “Karlberg traced the concept of symmetrical communication from historic philosophers such as Plato through such modern thinkers as Jurgen Habermas. In an attempt to reconcile ethical approaches to public relations with the concept of symmetrical communications, Karlberg called for a new research agenda to develop true discourse between organizations and publics. We believe that further discussion of dialogic communication will contribute to the development of true organization-to-public discourse” (323). Kent and Taylor also concluded, “Intersubjective process in which parties come to a relationship with openness and respect” (326), holds true between organizations. Symmetrical relationships are significant when considering communication between individuals and organizations, and will be discussed in other areas of this dissertation.

As discussed in greater length in Chapter III, the competence and well-being of an organization’s discourse community is relevant to its ability to diffuse or deflect crisis events. It stands to reason that an organization that communicates efficiently with its discourse communities (stakeholders) is more adept in responding to crisis issues, and more efficient in messaging among the various parts of the discourse community during various crisis discovery stages (Egelhoff 448, Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer 20, 66).

Rhetorical elements of crisis communication and management are important to routine operations of all types of organizations, not isolated to any particular type or size of organization, and certainly not confined to a condition of crisis. A management philosophy incorporating a strategic crisis plan emphasizing a

persuasive communication agenda reduces the opportunity for true crisis and mitigates the effects of a crisis.

Given the nature of narrative—especially as a cultural archetype, this rhetorical approach has the potentiality to inform crisis planning, management, and communication activities in a way that is coherent and systematic. It allows for persons who are engaged in crisis planning and response to sense the narrative thematic continuity that is expected of the organization and to image the narrative events (such as terrorism) that could occur—because they are possible or probable narratives. The facets of narrative offer a coherent way of thinking about the kinds of statements—the scripts that are available, criteria for judging them, and the sorts of persons who can reasonably use those lines to enact a coherent organization than has or will regain control over its events (Miller and Heath 186).

In discussing these case studies, I refer to my earlier trepidation in equating rhetoric with modern day communication issues. Classical rhetoric intersects speech with audiences, and the issues involved in these case studies exhibit deficiencies in communication strategies. Except in rare cases in these examinations, it was not possible to find specific statements from the principles to show dysfunctions in rhetorical style. Thus, my conclusions are indeed implicit.

It is within this context that the following recent examples involving prominent communication issues are offered, including 1) Kennesaw State University



anti-Semitic litigation; 2) the Martha Stewart insider trading litigation; 3) the Tylenol arsenic lacing crisis and 4) the NASA Challenger tragedy.

### Kennesaw State University Case

In 1995 at Kennesaw State University (KSU), a department chair charged she was dismissed in retaliation for her claims that she was protecting Jewish faculty members from losing their contracts to teach at the institution. What ensued were high stakes litigation and a public relations crisis for both KSU and the Georgia Board of Regents.

This is a classic and not altogether uncommon institutional crisis demonstrating a lack of an efficient internal communication policy and a discourse community badly in need of repair. Not having previously developed a strong and proactive external message to use as a support platform, it was impossible for KSU to correct a quickly disintegrating relationship with employees and various external communities, especially the Atlanta Jewish community. I might note for legal purposes that the opinions expressed in this dissertation on this matter are entirely my own, and they are opinions based on the facts as I know them.

### *Background and Discussion*

My first official action as an Assistant to the President was to convince state treasury officials in Georgia of the need to write us a high six-figure check payable to the plaintiffs by order of the district Federal court as part of a court-negotiated settlement. The settlement negotiators gave KSU very limited time to produce the

check, or risk going back to court to face additional charges (that the institution was almost certain to lose).

Coming into this situation nearing its conclusion, I was called upon to find the settlement funds from the state and also to draft statements by the President and other administrators to respond to a voracious media and a furious Jewish community in Atlanta. In the coming weeks, I was thrown into a hornet's nest between the President, the faculty, representatives of the local, state, and national media and several religious organizations in Atlanta.

The faculty member plaintiff was a Professor of Communication who knew quite well how to manipulate the media and gather support groups, and who also had an attorney for a husband that was co-counsel in trying the Federal case. Together, the husband and wife team were adroit in bringing community pressure on KSU, and fomenting people and organizations to assist in their case and cause. When KSU was offered the six-figure settlement by the plaintiffs, there were many voices suggesting that we accept it, with a fear of much greater costs if we did not. I was one of those voices because I feared much greater financial liability by pursuing other courses.

What started out as routine budget maneuvering at the beginning of this journey turned out as an extended struggle with reputations, careers, and academic consequences hanging in the balance. KSU's VP for Academic Affairs initially instructed a Department Chair (the plaintiff) to cut two adjunct faculty positions from her department. The two individuals in the positions happened to be Jewish. The Chair contested the reductions on the grounds that they were the only two Jewish faculty members in her department. The Chair ultimately was dismissed as

Department Chair with an offer for her to return to her job as a professor of communications (same pay). She declined the offer and left the university.

In addition to writing several scathing letters to the KSU administration that gained media attention, the plaintiff also became the center of attention in several metropolitan Atlanta's Jewish community groups. Several meetings and demonstrations were held during the following few weeks in which KSU's anti-Semitic climate was the sole subject of discussion. The former Chair effectively brought together several Jewish groups with a call to arms that KSU's actions were anti-Semitic from the beginning, and that she was dismissed from her job because she was protecting her Jewish faculty. In public relations terms, nothing could be worse for university fundraising, faculty, and student recruitment, or employee morale.

As I understood the initial actions, the reason for the budgeting changes in the department was to redirect funds to allow for more full-time faculty positions that were being suggested by the Board of Regents. KSU had grown quickly in the previous years and, typical to many universities, administrators accommodated that growth using relatively low cost adjunct faculty. However; the Regents preferred full-time, terminal degree faculty to teach the students, and KSU began a tedious and unpopular process to accommodate their direction. These issues and tasks are quite ordinary at universities and colleges. There should have been no issue at stake, except perhaps for a few disgruntled contract employees who had to seek employment elsewhere. Not to be dismissed lightly; however, the result should not have been the tumultuous process that unfolded over the following two years.

When the Chair began her tactical strategy of blaming administrators for purging the two Jewish faculty because they were Jewish, there were few policies or strategies in place to fend off the accusations leveled at the institution. In essence, the university was without armor in dealing with a hostile media and a furious public, and there were few organizations or individuals willing to come to the institution's defense. That there were no crisis plans in place meant that strategically, the institution was reactive to divisive and expensive salvos from its numerous stakeholders, and unfortunately impotent in dealing with resulting internal chaos. It is difficult to develop policy when public demonstrations against you are attended by National advocacy groups, local and National media.

I recall during the most trying time of the crisis, setting up appointments, and escorting the President to meet Jewish leaders in Atlanta. We met with the President of the Atlanta Jewish League, a high ranking member of the Anti-defamation League, and a member of KSU's own Board of Trustees who was (and remains) a very influential Jewish leader in Atlanta. The President had never before met any of the three except for the Board member, and in that case had never had a conversation with him about the issues involved in the trial. That there was no prior relationship was a serious mistake.

The meetings were very difficult: each Jewish leader was intransigent in his opinions over KSU's wrongdoing, and all were furious with the President's unwillingness to take decisive action to address the problems. Whether or not their views were legitimate, the President was in the hot spot, and her ultimate refusal to work toward a solution was lapping over into the daily work of the university.

Student groups were protesting, faculty members were loudly voicing their opinions to a waiting media, and fundraising efforts were essentially indefinitely placed on hold. Senior staff members at the university were spending much of their time dealing with the crisis, as it found its way into the operating activities of many areas.

What are the principles of rhetoric in this crisis? Millar and Heath, agreeing with Selznick wrote, “The pressure external groups exert on organizations affect the organization’s structures and values” (237). This was certainly true in the case of KSU. The incessant national media attention and the continuing public criticism of KSU by Jewish groups and leaders quickly took its toll internally. KSU had no procedures to lift up the employees or to explain the situation, and the President was not popular enough to withstand the personal scrutiny. When the crisis ended finally, there was no closure noted by the President. She stayed in her bunker uncertain what to do next.

There was no apology. Granted, many crisis strategists suggest that apologies lead to new and bigger problems. In this case, statements of regret and reform would have been appropriate.

What audiences might have been targeted for this ‘image restoration’ effort? Probably in the following priority order 1) faculty; 2) students; 3) institutional board members (in other words, repair the family first); 4) Jewish leaders and organizations; 5) the media; and, 6) the institutional administration and the Regents.

A committee headed by the President taking diligent action would have been appropriate. Ideas on solutions could have been solicited, and then quick action should have been taken. Detractors could have been silenced easily with the

comment, “We are doing all in our power to restore the good image of our institution and the important relationships with our family and friends.”

Bryant states that, “Rhetoric is the rationale of informative and suatory discourse” (404). The opportunity for KSU would have been to anticipate a variety of faculty situations (including the notion of diversity infringement charges), preparing a plan for the eventuality, and developing a *persuasive* approach to some very prevalent and intrusive issues of the modern day work environment.

Taking that thought a step further, within the boundaries of persuasive argument; administrators would have planted the seeds of a more congenial academic environment through assurances of diversity management well before problems occurred. Working through the academic hierarchy from the President, through the VP and Department Heads to the faculty, what were the directions from the Regents on adjunct faculty; what would it mean to the faculty base; how would faculty displacements be handled or mitigated; how many adjuncts would be lost? The administrative hierarchy could easily have demonstrated their compassion for the ensuing process through a determined effort to mitigate the damages. During this process, problems could have been ascertained and addressed thus removing the opportunity for surprises and potential lawsuits. Such a process would have been both vertical and horizontal, with the objectives being to inform, mitigate, and persuade.

As a result, it was only after these significant debilitating events occurred that the institution’s President attempted to develop active plans to salvage the reputation of the institution. Unfortunately, because KSU had effectively neglected Jewish

groups in Atlanta, there was every opportunity for these groups to respond negatively when anti-Semitism was first alleged at the institution.

An additional problem was the lack of response from the university following months of negative publicity. Lacking sufficient internal policy, the university had transferred *ownership* of the issue to the state Board of Regents because of the pending litigation issue. This was a mistake, even considering the legal issues. While a spokesperson or President always must be mindful of the admission of culpability, in most circumstances apologies, expressions of sadness and admissions of responsibility are appropriate. Many scholars suggest that within the boundaries of rhetoric, statements of apology and the naming of a variety of mitigative circumstances are important in messaging to stakeholders. Some scholars suggest taking responsible action when necessary to aid the persuasive process. As a public statement, the President of KSU might have demoted or dismissed administrators responsible for egregious mistakes made in administering policy (for example the lack of coordination with employees prior to the initiation of faculty reduction). She certainly should have been more proactive in peace-making efforts with the stakeholders, including even *mea culpa* sessions with Jewish leaders.

Over a period of several years since the first case, various individuals in the institution have been sued for diversity issues, anti-Semitism, gender discrimination, and racial bias. As is often the case, the issues and accusations tended to escalate over time because the public tends to develop memories of controversial things, especially those that were the target of the media. I call the problems at KSU “generational” because it is likely the persona of the university has become

synonymous with diversity problems that will linger for a generation. The issues involved here happened a decade ago. However, the sense of anti-Semitism lingers on in many individuals and organizations in Atlanta.

### *Summary*

Were the people of Kennesaw State anti-Semitic? I saw no evidence to support that contention. In fact, by all accounts, the administrators were well-intentioned individuals ill prepared for the crisis and who bungled some rather routine personnel assignments. The unfortunate part was that the facts were probably on the side of KSU, only their administrative policy and discourse community were so badly mismanaged, any and all attempts to fix things only got them in worse trouble.

Among the pre-crisis event mistakes of Kennesaw State were a lack of organized discourse in what Aristotle called the “extrinsic or non-artistic means of persuasion instruments of the wielder of public opinion, and...staples of techniques recognized as being within the rhetorical tradition that includes propaganda. What we are searching for is the consummate enthymeme, to be based on probabilities and strategies. *If we establish a theme of consistency in word and deed, what then would be the outcome*” (Bryant 405).

Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer found, “As organizations grow in size and complexity, their responsiveness to public concerns is often compromised. Organizational leaders become further insulated from the concerns of employees, clients, and customers...This perspective inherently overlooks the needs of local communities, ignores placed-based contingencies, and disregards provisional



perspectives” (264). The convergence of Bryant’s statement in 1953 and the statement of Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer fifty years later is important to understanding the mistakes in leading KSU to this crisis.

The institutional growth had been significant, and it took its toll on the way administrators perceived their goals. At some point, the perceived higher objectives and workload of educating the enlarged student body had diminished earlier values of relationship building and fund raising. The consequence was that the institution had become an icon disassociated from its audience with neither the ability nor the desire for connection.

#### Martha Stewart Case

In 2002, Martha Stewart was indicted and convicted for insider trading. While the amount of money involved was minimal, Stewart’s reputation, the holdings and assets of her company, and the advertising contracts she enjoyed were all at risk. Her lack of candor with the media and the courts turned what probably could have been a ‘slap on the wrist’ into major reductions in the price of stocks in her corporation, a loss in credibility and reputation, and a jail term.

On and off the witness stand, she continually denied receiving any advice from insiders in spite of clear evidence to the contrary. After serving a prison sentence, she was not contrite and continued to say she was a target because of her fame and not guilty of the crimes for which she was convicted.

On the stand during her trial, the prosecution produced a number of witnesses stating that Stewart treated people roughly and unprofessionally and tended to berate

those around her. Upon release from a light prison sentence, Stewart continued to blame others for her sins, stating in an interview with *Vanity Fair Magazine* that the trial had little to do with her, but would be used as an example in larger insider trading deals. She also very naively indicated she knew how to disable the electronic ankle cuffs she had to wear while under house arrest. During her house arrest, Stewart broke her parole agreements on several occasions, appearing on television talk shows, attending events in various cities, and shopping in local markets. Ultimately, parole officers recalled her parole, and a judge ruled that her house arrest period would be extended.

Stepping back a bit from the initial accusations, indictment, trial, prison time, and then her release to house arrest, it is easy to see that Stewart acted like a spoiled wealthy aristocrat. She was (and is) a billionaire, legendary in her talent for cooking, design, and sophisticated living style. She built a fortune and an empire on being able to convey simple elegance to the average American woman.

Yet, while gathering a hundred million adoring Americans, she failed to heed some basic tenets of elocution and rhetoric. Her unwillingness to accept responsibility at any point in the process gave the impression of impatience, impudence and a sentiment that she was above the law. Wallace, reflecting the views of Aristotle wrote, "Communication inevitably must stand for and must reflect the same ethical values as the political society of which it is a part" (5). Blair reflected upon, "The virtuous orator who wishes to persuade seeks to touch the heart of his audience," and, "The eloquence and virtuosity of the speaker as the chief means of persuasion" (23), in essence suggesting that a speaker evoke sympathy from his

audience as a means of developing pathos in the situation. Stewart should have recognized that her fortunes were built on her reputation as a spokesperson for the masses, that millions were living vicariously through her. Her lack of rhetorical sensitivity and her forgetfulness of her audience necessitated her fall from grace.

Among her other rhetorical gaffes must have been her unwillingness to apologize to her stakeholders and the public. The punishment would have been much less, and she would possibly not have served in prison so long. However, it was not in her personality to use an oratory that showed virtue. From the beginning, she acted as if she were the victim, not the criminal.

Ryan wrote, “In reaction to the accusation, the apologist is motivated to deny, to mitigate, or to purify the resultant image, and the rhetorical response to that motivation is a speech in apology. Continuing, he wrote, quoting Cicero, “The apologist for policy absolves himself of the fact (I did not do it), he explains the definition, (I did not do what is alleged), he justifies the quality (I had laudable intentions), and he vindicates the jurisdiction (I appeal to a different audience or judge)” (257).

Stewart never apologized until her stock prices dramatically fell and she was nearing jail time, and then her apology was mixed. Kennesaw State University never apologized (on advice of counsel) and suffered years of neglect by sectors of the philanthropic community and became a pariah among certain communities.

Neither committed horrendous crimes against humanity and theirs certainly pale in comparison to some. Yet both had high visibility, and neither embraced rules of honor and rhetoric that can be artfully configured and enabled for human errors.

Nor did they offer sorrow for their sins or, in the suggestion of Cicero, seek out laudable and mitigative solutions. Both were then, and now remain vilified by the media. Both incurred significant financial and reputational loss because of their rhetorical sins. Both received their punishment due to arrogance and mismanagement.

### Tylenol Case

The 1982 Johnson and Johnson (J&J) Tylenol poisoning crisis is considered by public relations experts as being one of the most adroitly handled crises of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many believe that J&J's honesty with the public and their willingness to accept responsibility apparently without regard for their own culpability set ethical and professional standards for crisis handling. Close examination of the actions and statements of the executive team shows that even without having a crisis management plan in place, the team exhibited exemplary tactical strategies in crisis management.

Some suggest that J&J's crisis management allowed the company to recoup much of the losses that were incurred during the crisis, and move the company to higher name recognition and sales in the years to follow. However, some experts argue that J&J's tactics in 1982 would produce drastically different results in the current business environment (Gorney 22). Gorney reasons that the two primary facets pushing Johnson and Johnson through the crisis were "user friendly" media and a much less litigious environment (22, 23).

Some facts about the crisis as reported by (Murray 15-17):

1. Seven people died and 250 became ill because of Tylenol capsule ingestion.

2. The FBI declared the cyanide lacings as an act of terrorism.
3. Johnson and Johnson recalled all Tylenol products from the store shelves throughout the nation at a cost of \$50 million.
4. J&J offered a \$100,000 reward for the perpetrator.
5. J&J ran a full-page ad in major newspapers following the deaths and illnesses, and set up a national hotline for information on reported illnesses, product safety warnings and on leads to find the perpetrator.
6. In the weeks to follow, J&J sent 450,000 electronic messages and representatives made 2,000 visits to physicians to explain the situation and to warn customers.
7. Samples of Tylenol are given to physicians in every state for their patients who are using the medicine.
8. More than 80,000 news stories across the nation are written on the crisis.
9. Three months after the crisis, Tylenol sales returned to 80% of the pre-crisis level.
10. J&J introduced tamper-resistant containers to the consumer for the first time.
11. Sales of products in these containers exceeded sales forecasts by 50%.

J&J's Chairman, James E Burke learned of the crisis in a telephone call from a news editor from the *Chicago Tribune* following illnesses in two separate poisonings reported in a local hospital. After confirming the connection between the illness and Tylenol, Burke convened a strategic planning team to oversee the crisis. The company had no prior conceived crisis management plan.

The team's strategy was to examine five issues and craft strategic plans for each:

1. How the poisonings were occurring.
2. Who was responsible?
3. Establish recall procedures.
4. How to minimize the financial damage to the company.
5. How to restore the company's excellent pre-crisis reputation.

My conclusion is that these steps exhibited strategic and important messaging tactics designed to establish connectivity with stakeholders. Burke's statement at the onset of the crisis established the standard for their strategy, "It will take time, it will take money, and it will be very difficult; but we consider it a moral imperative as well as good business, to restore Tylenol to its preeminent position.' (Johnson & Johnson)" (Kaplan 5).

Officers in the company knew that with each passing day of headlines reporting the events, it was going to be more and more difficult to maintain the confidence of the public. Within several days following the first reported poisoning, Burke announced that while their investigations of the incidents were inconclusive, the company was removing all Tylenol products from store shelves, and that the company would mount an all-out examination of prevention of such events in the future. J&J immediately offered to replace Tylenol capsules with tamper proof caplets.

Analysis of the actions of the company showed their willingness to be accountable to the public, take immediate action to protect the public, and to seek strong preventive remedies endeared the company to the public. Adding to their success was a willingness to take these actions in light of the certainty of litigation. Several issues of discourse and rhetoric were evident.

First, the company benefited from a long positive relationship with its stakeholders and the public. Many scholars, noted in this dissertation, have concluded that prior relationships tend to mitigate damage when times get tough. Second, unlike many organizations, the public relations functions were part of the Chairman's office and played an ongoing key role in his actions and statements. The discourse community of the organization was comprehensive, focused and with one voice to the public, again an important element in rhetorical direction. Brockriede refers to a rhetorical situation in which communication is directed for distinct purposes of messaging. "A direct channel is a system of communication in which one person relates to someone else without the interference or aid of a third persons or a mechanical device. The oral interpretation act, the speaker who reaches the newspaper reader via a reporter, the tape recording, television and the two-step flow of communication all illustrate the indirect channel" (1966 8). My reasoning of the importance of this interpretation of rhetoric is that a spokesperson who communicates directly with his audience, and who is sincere in his messaging will succeed over those who simply feed information to others. This was the case with Chairman Burke, who gives the following account of his discussions with the media (there are a

number of grammar problems with this statement, however; it is written exactly as it was posted in the Journal article):

I went to the media. After this happened, I called the chairman of each network and told them I wanted to talk to the head of news, but I didn't want them there, and I didn't want anyone else there. And I wasn't going to bring anybody. I talked to the head of news of each network, alone. There was no public relations spiel. 'I want you to know we're going to give you all the information we have. We're going to play it straight with you. At the moment [during the crisis] we don't have any poison in our plants that could account for this, but we're doing a lot of investigating and I will keep you informed'

(Ettore 15, 16).

The message from the company addressed the well-being of the public, and not the well-being of the company. The public's response was one of acceptance and support. Bator, in reference to Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783)—writings on the use of pathos in discourse—concluded, "The virtuous orator who wishes to persuade seeks to touch the heart of his audience...Blair places his emphasis instead upon the eloquence and virtuosity of the speaker as the chief means of persuasion" (420). This was the intent and the execution of the chair of J&J, and is precisely why the organization ultimately made a success from this crisis.

It is also noteworthy that the media and the public apparently accepted the notion by Chairman Burke that both the company and the public were victims, "You and we are joint victims of this crime" (Murray & Shohen 18). This was an adroit



tactic helped greatly by the FBI's assessment of the tampering as a terrorist act. It is a classic rhetorical strategy to claim that the accusation is not correct and that the reader/audience must appeal to a different judge (Ryan 257). Burke skillfully in these statements is deflecting the crime and the impact without redirecting the responsibility (though this happens indirectly). In effect, the public wanted J&J to succeed in this crisis, quite unlike the public's fury at Kennesaw State.

Regardless of the tactical aspect of the crisis—indeed J&J followed most of the currently acceptable procedures suggested for crisis management—it would be inaccurate to state that the company was unwilling to fully accept accountability for the crisis. That Burke personally directed such a massive public relations effort to inform the public, recall and replace products exhibited enormous resolve and apologia, an important facet of rhetoric.

Benoit concluded that in a crisis, there exists a “topology of image restoration strategies” (178) in which organizations should prepare their response discourse. These include, apologia, denial, evasion of responsibility, reduce the offensiveness, corrective action, mortification (beg forgiveness) (178-181). I contend that Burke utilized these strategies. While some might argue Burke accepted total responsibility in all regards, I conclude his statements connecting “victim” status to both the public and to J&J effectively partially deflected responsibility to the terrorists who perpetrated the crime.

Granted, while Burke and J&J accepted the *accountability* of the crisis through their actions and statements, it is clear there were multiple benefits to the company in so doing. Johnson & Sellnow tend to agree with this assessment,

concluding, “Ryan (1982, 1984, 1988) offers a discussion of how policy arguments function in messages of both accusation and apology. He contends that any analysis of apologetic discourse is most accurate when the apology is viewed in concert with the accusations, *kategoria*, to which the apologist is responding. Ryan (1982) observes that accusatory messages focus on the policies and character of the accused” (54).

I contend that within a clear rhetorical frame of reference, these statements relate to J&J in that they set the tone for strategic messaging, establish a framework for actions to be taken, and reasonably guide an organization in how to respond to a crisis situation. Benoit concluded, “Because image restoration rhetoric is a form of persuasive discourse, suggestions for effectiveness can be derived from our understanding of persuasion generally. The analysis of the cola wars (28) reveals advice applicable to persuasion generally; avoid making false claims; provide adequate support for claims, develop themes throughout a campaign; avoid arguments that may backfire (183). J&J met these guidelines ultimately succeeding in crisis management and in image restoration.

### Challenger Case

The Space Shuttle *Challenger* blew up moments after lift-off killing the astronauts and setting NASA’s space exploration years off course due to microscopic scrutiny from the media, public and government funding agencies, including Congress. While the blame for the explosion was placed on failure of mechanical parts (the joint assembly and the “O” rings), the ultimate responsibility came to roost

on a lack of communication between engineers and managers within NASA. Engineers, technicians. The issues of the crisis had to do with public image, communication within an organization, and later, image repair. My research shows a relationship between the NASA organization, the Challenger disaster, and issues of rhetoric.

Millar & Heath concluded, “Organizations must sustain an effective image with their stakeholders in order to maximize their chances for success (Garbett, 1988). Although failure is not inevitable when an organization’s image is tarnished, it is more likely, as many studies have demonstrated...Organizational image management is a dialogic process in which organizations and stakeholders communicate with one another to co-create the image of the organization. An organization’s image is the ‘shared meanings, attitudes, knowledge, and opinions’ of organizational stakeholders, influenced, at least in part by strategic communications emanating from the organizations” (234).

Thus, when the Challenger accident occurred, the public’s reaction was not punitive toward NASA. Rather, NASA’s positive image prior image helped to form a protective barrier to insulate it against public reaction that in other instances might well have been manifested in anger (Three Mile Island, Chernobyl).

As it turned out, the failure of the field joint assembly and the O-rings were simply physical failures. This was evident in testimony before Congress and in painstaking groundtruthing of the parts of Challenger that fell to the earth. Yet the underlying issues emanating from the hearings did not point to mechanical failure

(which became noted as a technical glitch), rather to an organization whose parts did not effectively communicate.

The Presidential Commission subsequent to Executive Order 12546 (Office of the President 1, 2) investigating the accident found, “Five different communication or organization failures that affected the launch decision on January 28, 1986. Four of those failures relate directly to faults within the safety program. These faults include a lack of problem reporting requirements, inadequate trend analysis, misrepresentation of criticality and lack of involvement in critical discussions” (NASA Report 152).

The NASA organization clearly had a breakdown in its internal discourse community. Bryant’s analysis of Aristotle provides information and direction. “Rhetoric is the rationale of informative and suasive discourse...It is therefore distinguished from the other instrumental studies in its preoccupation with informed opinion rather than with scientific demonstration...Rhetoric however; because it normally deals with matters of uncertainty must admit *probability* not only in its premises but in its method also” (406).

In this passage, Bryant is reasoning that rhetoric embraces topics of information exchange and establishes rules for both scientific discussion and political discourse between individuals. Yet he focuses on probability as an important part of discourse.

Did the NASA team properly consider the probability of the failure of the parts in their communication? The Presidential Commission reported that in several previous test launches, the O-rings were seared by hot gases from exhaust. The

conclusion from the Commission was that NASA must have figured since the O-rings had not faltered in previous flights, therefore the probability was to consider them infallible with the final flight. *Probability* as a matter of the discourse community was apparently diminished in priority with disastrous results.

Another factor in play with the Challenger loss was the apparent desire by NASA officials to meet public desire for the Challenger to fly at virtually any cost. Enormous media attention had been given to the teacher Christa McAuliffe as an astronaut, and the public embraced her presence as part of the flight team. Further, it had been several years since a mission had flown, in the midst of several significant setbacks. This was the opportunity to set things back on the right path. In short, the public clamored for the flight. This fact was not lost on the hearings following the disaster, with the Commission noting that NASA felt a great deal of public pressure to launch.

“Selznick (1949) argued that the pressure external groups exert on organizations affect the organization’s structure and values. Selznick viewed organizations as adaptive organization systems, ‘affected by the social characteristics of its participants as well as by the varied pressures imposed by its environment.’ Institutionalization is a process where the organization adapts its values to those predominant in its environment. Parsons argued that organizations gain legitimacy to the extent that their actions reflect the cultural values of society” (Millar & Heath 237). It was clear that NASA intended to fly this mission, and the management team clearly overlooked internal flaws in their processes in getting to the launch date. Given the recent history of NASA with the Apollo crash and several delayed

launches, the organization was pressured from many sectors. Millar & Heath noted, “The more an organization feels that its legitimacy is threatened (as in times of crisis), the more the organization will typically attempt to do to regain its legitimacy in the eyes of its stakeholders” (239).

With this in mind, NASA seemed to be on the precipice of disaster even before the mission. Its executives were playing a mental game of catch up with Congressional leaders, scientists from around the world, and with the public.

These issues were assuredly not the singular reason Challenger crashed; rather they played an important role in how the various systems integrated as the launch date neared. Brockriede wrote, “But what qualities must a systematic theory of rhetoric attain? In at least two senses, the theory should be dynamic. It should change as new methods for observing and testing contemporary rhetorical precepts are developed. It should also be dynamic in the sense of being perceived as itself a process which reflects the continual changes in rhetorical activity” (Brockriede 1966 37). In other writings, Brockriede talks about the *format* of discourse communities within the auspice of rhetoric, “the essential concern of this dimension being how procedures, norms, and conventions operate to determine who speaks and who listens” (Brockriede 1968 7).

NASA failed to stay in tune with its discourse community. Administrators played to an audience whose romantic notion of the flight betrayed no desire to understand or perceive the hard scientific requirements involved. It is reminiscent of fans demanding that an aging athlete continue to play in spite of clear signs of fatigue

and the sheer lack of physical ability. The fans did not care. They simply wanted their hero to be equal to their dreams.

Secondly, NASA did not perceive the dynamic communications issues influencing decisions, engineers and contractors failing to discuss key issues before continuing the operations, and the changing of protocol for accountability teams for the sake of efficiency and timing. The NASA team even overlooked changing weather conditions that included icing during some unusually cold weather.

Thus, aside from the communication failure relevant to the Challenger crash, it became evident that the organization found itself unable to effectively function (though it was evident they did not perceive this to be the case prior to the crash). Peters & Waterman (307, 308) discuss a complex organizational system called a “matrix management structure,” in which management organizes around a particular function, typically the activity in the organization that is the breadwinner. Historically, this type of structure occurs in larger organizations, however; its use is not restrictive.

For example, Scripto Corporation has a writing utensil division that produces much of the company’s profit. In the matrix management structure, all other support entities in the company might be organized around the needs of the pen division. Another example might be a small college in which all parts are arranged around the academic departments. In both examples, there is a matrix surrounding the focal point of the organization, somewhat independent of the priority department, but supportive of all of the groups.

Peters and Waterman concluded that NASA achieved some success with this system of management, particularly because of the diversity and enormity of their workflow. However, the authors also stated that such a matrix has a fundamental flaw in that it tended to dilute functions and key objectives. If you work in engineering and a member of the consulting team from another division has a problem with your work, what is the communication link to allow that to happen? Peters and Waterman suggest that this type of structure “automatically decentralizes priorities” (307-308), thus diminishing effective messaging.

This is precisely the information flow issue that the Presidential commission found flaw with in the Challenger space shuttle accident. One group was not talking to another and the system did not efficiently allow for accountability.

In essence, the NASA discourse community broke down, failing to allow for important dynamic processes and ignoring probabilities in the many assigned tasks. The matrix issues discussed by Waters and Peterman are largely structural in nature. However, the problems of the matrix system, brought to light by the investigative commissions, are largely of an inefficient discourse community in which rhetorical concepts were not in place. It is interesting to note that Peters and Waterman wrote their brief analysis of NASA in 1968, far in advance of the shuttle disaster in 1986.

### *Chapter Summary*

These crisis situations illustrate complexities in the modern work environment and individuals and organizations that had not adequately considered or implemented strategic communication policies. Furthermore, the behavior and language of the people involved in these crises exhibited breaches with commonly accepted rhetorical



principles. The results range from relatively small financial loss to (potentially) many billions of dollars. They range from loss of reputation to loss of life. They range from significant impact on the bottom line to significant loss of stakeholder value whether financial or reputational.

What is the link between each of these cases? How are these issues related to strategic communication issues within all organizations, whether large or small corporations, non-profits, or educational institutions? What relationship do these issues and cases have with the values intrinsic to writing, composition, and rhetoric?

Brockriede, quoting Maurice Natanson, wrote, “Rhetoric in the narrower aspect involves rhetorical intention in the sense that a speaker or writer may devote his effort to persuade for some cause or object” (1966 33). In each of the foregoing case studies, a communication policy (or lack thereof) substantially influenced the ability to deal with the circumstances before, during, and after the event itself.

Yet the issues go beyond communication policy to a comprehensive strategy in dealing with people through language. Gorgias, Isocrates, and Socrates all spoke to the power of language in the sense of persuasion. Crowley, paraphrasing Gorgias, wrote, “Language was such a persuasive force that it could bewitch people, could jolt them out of their everyday awareness into a new one from which they could see things differently” (13). The essence of these cases involves principles in rhetoric that define the relationship between a speaker and an audience and establish *rules* of discourse based on language. Granted these rules seem to be almost infinite, and ever changing. Rhetorical rules and guidance are matters of translation and discernment, with countless scholarly disputes and debate over thousands of years.

There is an important relationship between classical rhetorical teaching and crisis communication. Many of these issues are evident in the case studies presented in this dissertation. Sans reiteration of details from various books and journals, there are at least five key issues I have identified that seem prominent in successful communication plans and organizational structure, all of which are grounded in rhetoric. 1) The organization should be sensitive and responsive to the various publics with a strong intent to develop positive relationships prior to the specific need for such relationships; 2) each organization must speak with “one voice” and this voice should attempt to connect with the interests, sympathies and heart of the listeners (both internal and external). To this end, language should convey meaning with the audience in mind; 3) the communication specialists (public relations) should be closely in tune with the leader (and vice versa), and the message should be developed as a team. Once the message is developed, then it becomes the voice of the organization; 4) the successful organizational structure attempts to bring the parts together in an efficient team that allows for unimpeded information flow; and 5) response messaging should take into account issues of apology, responsibility, accountability, mitigation and possibly sorrow. Each of these cases demonstrates positive and negative aspects of strategic messaging during “crises.” These are lessons in composition and organizational structure, but primarily they illustrate issues of communication and language. Are they issues of *crisis* communication? Crisis communication is simply one of the elements of a larger communication strategy that is deeply rooted in rhetorical design, organizational dynamics, and persuasive techniques.

## CHAPTER II: CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN CONTEXT

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### *Part IV: Crisis Communication in Context to Crisis Management*

Crisis communication from a chief communication officer's perspective means dealing with ever-changing external stimuli. A media event on one day may not surface the next because of another, unrelated incident somewhere on the other side of the world. What you expected to be heavily covered in local news thankfully falls with a thud for unknown reasons. The converse happens as well—on a day when big news is not hitting the news outlets; small crises are blown completely out of proportion in the media. News escalates without apparent explanation and copy once relegated to bottom drawer status now finds its way into view where niche audiences are drawn to it. When niche audiences get interested, news sometimes zigzags its way into the mainstream where it develops mass and momentum, discussed previously in this dissertation.

People embrace scandals, titillating rumors, catastrophes, and drama. However, the public is immensely fickle and is often persuaded on the basis of human theater and not fact. Worse, they are sometimes led into the aura of crisis as unwitting accomplices by individuals with biased objectives and a stake in the action. When this happens, only the worst may be expected.

An example of this occurred in May 2005 when *Newsweek Magazine* reported actions taken by military prison guards in Guantanamo Bay Cuba. *Newsweek*, acting on an anonymous tip from sources in the Pentagon, reported that prison guards

attempted to desecrate the Koran in the prison toilets as a means of torturing the Afghan prisoners.

The story quickly spread internationally and became headlines for several days in America. It inflamed escalating nerves over the Iraqi war, and incensed Muslims throughout the world, also giving fodder to opponents of the war. Congressional and military investigations were immediately launched. On all the news channels in the following days, the American public was saturated with clips of high-ranking officials traveling to Cuba to place their stake in the hullabaloo. A high ranking Senator, Dick Durbin from Illinois, said the desecration were reminiscent of the torture of Jewish prisoners in Nazi Germany (he later recanted his statements in a teary apology on the floor of the Senate); some equated the issues to a military devoid of religion; others said the Afghans were getting what they deserved. Inflammatory remarks such as these infuriated politicians, policymakers and publics in many nations. Polls were taken and views of Americans by demographic sector splashed across the television screen and on the front page of the newspapers.

In Afghanistan, where the American military had posts, local Afghans staged demonstrations over the desecration of the Koran. Ultimately, their demonstrations became violent and the world media reported twenty-six Afghans getting killed after a gun battle with American soldiers. The American government had a full-blown worldwide crisis on their hands fueled by one article appearing in one magazine.

The tip leading the reporter to write about the incident in Guantanamo Bay was later found out to be false. *Newsweek* apologized profusely for their inaccurate story, however; the damage was done. In this case, the story was false and people

died as a result and government leaders from many nations collided with each other. But it seemed almost as if the media simply became bystanders after a few days of the fury. Once a story was created, players from many sides in governments and populations around the world took control of the life of the crisis. Then the media reported the action. As with Randolph Hearst in the newspaper crisis in 1800's in the Spanish American War (Chapter II, Part VI) in which the media became part of the story, similarly, here the media and the crisis were co-conspirators.

The reporter who wrote the copy was a respected journalist who apparently was duped by a Pentagon insider for unknown reasons. Yet in the reporter's mind, the story had to be written. For what motivation, no one but he knows—money, advertising space, personal glory, the Pulitzer Prize, etc. Having been in the field for quite a few years, I have come to consider the relationship between a journalist and the impact of his story as a *planned disconnection*. I am sure the journalist felt the article on the Koran was important to report and even more important to defend. He was assuredly heartbroken over the tragic loss of life as a result of his reporting. Sheer speculation, but was he repentant? Doubtful. Would he do it again under similar circumstances? Of this, there is little doubt.

Barring legal issues of slander or libel that rarely apply to journalism involving the public domain, there is a genuine lack of accountability between the journalist and the effect of his journalism. Crises are often caused by good information, misinformation, or no information. I have had journalists contact me for facts on a story, and when I could not come up with any, or for some reason turned down the offer, the journalist simply made facts up and attributed them to me. I have

spent many hours over the years explaining to my chairmen or presidents why statements in the media attributed to me were never said or implied. It is wishful to think this were the exception and not the rule; however, that is not the case.

Reporters write their copy, doing the best they can to gain facts, but without all of them find a way to write the article anyway. Executives who do not deal with the media fail to understand these tactics—which is an excellent reason a communication officer should work hand-in-hand with his superiors, even forcing them to become involved with journalists.

If the lead story turns the public's neck in one direction, then a crisis is created and perhaps a dozen are averted. The media's penchant for grandstanding, while being offensive to many of us, seems to capture the audience every time. On more than one occasion in the middle of media frenzy over something in which my organization was involved, I longed for another crisis far away to replace local headlines.

Thus, with these sobering thoughts about the vagaries of the press, we begin an examination of the methodology of crisis communication, a discipline fueled by seemingly unlimited stimuli from countless known and unknown stakeholders, apparently standing by to inflict havoc at a moment's notice.

Crisis communication may be considered as two interrelated methodologies in organizational management. First, it involves relatively short term messaging to various stakeholders and the public during and after a specific crisis event as a means of providing vital information. In this methodology, it is a component of a strategic

plan for crisis management and establishes who delivers information and the various platforms by which the information is delivered.

Second, crisis communication is an important element of a comprehensive management strategy for operations. In this more expansive definition, crisis events may come and go; however, the crisis communication systems are always in place providing direction and structure. This method of crisis communication involves a wide range of organizational dynamics that are concerned with relationships, vertical and horizontal messaging. Here, crisis communication is an ongoing administrative process for organizational discourse.

Still a management strategy in a stage of discovery, crisis communication exists within the more recognized fields of public relations, media relations, rhetoric, management, journalism, marketing, and professional writing. Few executives are skilled in crisis communication without having some knowledge of each of these fields.

Crisis communication is theoretical, much like advertising. Advertising professionals often produce propaganda that is not persuasive. They occasionally simply miss the mark because of the difficulty of accurately predicting what messages will resonate with consumers. Sometimes it becomes a matter of taste or personal preference.

As an example of this, recently for the start-up of a naming and branding campaign for a new college, our organization's selected vendor, a local public relations firm, was asked to find naming options and to design several logo and branding concepts—aimed toward several intended markets. The consultants

returned with a number of options, whereupon senior staff sat around a conference table and debated the strengths and weaknesses of each. The conversation was lively and sometimes rancorous, with little agreement. It was a wonderful example of diversity of opinion on a seemingly simplistic topic. Yet, this example simply reflects the complexity of pinpointing reaction to one man's opinion (or even a group's opinion) in a world of humans.

Crisis communication experts operate within a similar slippery field of organizational dynamics, management, and public relations. It not only involves messaging, but also a strategy of implementation involving a complex system of media pitches and responses, administrative process and behavioral systems—all primarily for the purpose of persuading various stakeholders. Thus, finding the right combination of messaging and management is difficult. Callison and Zillmann wrote, "Public relations-based messages are persuasive at heart. Whereas in most cases not overtly attempting to modify an audience's attitude in an extreme way, public relations messages are written with the goals of the organization in mind and with an intention of improving or maintaining favorable impressions or beliefs about the organization" (86).

Studies of crisis incidents clearly show the complexities of maintaining credibility with messaging and of doing a good job at it. Analyses of the massive oil spill tragedy in Alaska by the Exxon Valdez showed that Exxon management had, "Comprehensive, though woefully inadequate" crisis management plans in place that involved a number of valid communication elements (Marra 468). Yet the public perception of the company during and after the oil spill remains poor as a result of



both the accident and the handling of the accident. It is a classic example of a crisis communication meltdown.

Darrin and Sellnow observed that, “Several authors have labeled the Exxon Valdez crisis communication as ineffective, because the corporation failed to provide a strong initial response in terms of both action and public communication” (55). However; they also theorize that post-crisis examination in this case study indicates a breakdown in the precrisis phase of operations. In essence, Exxon failed to adequately train key personnel on the ship and this precipitated human error during the journey, resulting in the tanker accident and oil spill. The implication of this is that while poor crisis communication policy was blamed for the slow and inadequate messaging, it is more likely that the messaging capability was simply overwhelmed by the situation. The real problem lay in the organization’s failure to engage in adequate preparation and communication to employees.

Notwithstanding the enormous tragedy of the Exxon Valdez, the ensuing crisis might be attributed to bad luck, bad timing, or simply overwhelming bad news. Yet there is evidence showing organizations that experience multiple crises or crises with devastating repercussions somehow have public sympathy working on their side. With the seemingly endless response deviations and enormous stakes involved, how can there be a consistent policy that has a chance of success?

Successful crisis management depends on well orchestrated *communication* strategies that include integrated short and long term process (see Chapter III, Introduction, and Part I on communication within the discourse community). A distinction needs to be made between *event* crisis communication and a more

comprehensive usage of long-term crisis communication principles. To understand the issues of crisis communication, there are several processes of crisis management that are important to discuss. These include 1) the life cycle of a crisis; 2) crisis forecasting and probability principles; and 3) crisis management teams.

Understanding and implementing these processes in an organization will often form the basis for a crisis strategic plan. Because I believe there to be dual strategies in crisis communication including both short and long term strategies, I want to make distinctions where appropriate. I also want to note that much of the following discussion is derived from Steven Fink's Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable. This is one of the definitive practitioner's handbooks on crisis management in today's market. Fink established important concepts in crisis administration, and also developed a formula for crisis identification and forecasting. However; his concepts are supported by independent examinations by many other authors and scholars including Marra, Benoit, Grunig & Grunig, Penrose, Johnson & Sellnow, Millar & Heath, and others on crisis definitions, phases of crisis, and crisis forecasting.

### *Life History of a Crisis*

Fink identified four phases to a crisis (20-28). These phases include:

1. Prodrormal Crisis Stage (early developmental crisis stage: this is the warning stage, and possibly the turning point in which an event or problem can be effectively dealt with. At this stage, the threat can diminish in value or get to the point where it becomes a real issue with an organization. A properly laid

out crisis management plan often averts or reduces the effect of an impending crisis.

2. **Acute Crisis Stage** (crisis discovery stage: the crisis is in progress and there is no turning back. Once the warnings have ended and you have passed from the developmental phase into the *acute* crisis stage, you can almost never recover the ground you lost. This is also the stage one can almost always point to a day and time in which the crisis started. Proper control techniques sometimes amount to a simple matter of timing of the delivery of communication from a company. However; once again, the best control is having a laid out plan that offers controlled management of and communication from an organization. This is the point at which a corporate executive must make critical decisions of a significant nature. He or she must activate whatever team is in place; address and respond to media pressures; begin to look for solutions; and, to consider opportunities for damage control.
3. **Chronic Crisis Stage** (crisis recovery stage: this is a period of recovery, of self-analysis, of self doubt, and of healing. This stage may linger indefinitely. Companies without a crisis management plan reported suffering lingering effects of a chronic crisis as much as two and a half times longer than companies that were prepared with a crisis management plan.
4. **Crisis Resolution Stage** (information gathering stage: this is the stage to which organizations and management should aspire during the previous three stages. No matter how long or how hard it is to get to this stage, whether or not a crisis management plan is in place; the resolution stage should be recognized

(and appreciated) once it arrives. With formal plans in place and with savvy management teams dealing with the crisis at every stage of the events leading to and during the crisis, key players should be thinking what they could do to speed up this phase and resolve this crisis once and for all with the intended objective of arriving at the crisis resolution stage.

When does a crisis start and when does it end? According to Fink, there are issues and times following crisis events in which bedlam exists in an organization. Employees, the public, other stakeholders and the media might all be confused or angry. Perhaps there is a situation occurring in which lives or property are endangered. In these situations, the crisis event has occurred and the organization has an acute crisis on its hands. There is usually an identifiable starting place that initiated the crisis when it is all over.

The Kennesaw State example discussed in Chapter II, Part III presents an interesting assemblage of crisis elements. In consideration of Fink's four stage crisis life history, was the action taken by the President to reduce the adjunct faculty levels considered the definitive *crisis even*? Was it the Communication Department Chair's decision to fight the decision to remove her Jewish faculty members? Might it have been her decision to litigate? Was it the court's decision to award almost \$1 million in penalty and legal fees to plaintiff? Or, was it the media attention and coordinated effort by the Jewish community to make a public display of the "firings" of the Jewish faculty members? Frankly each of these represented mini-crises within the

context of a much larger crisis event. Each increased on the backs of the preceding events and each became larger with more influence and more public scrutiny.

In Fink's model, the event that triggered the overall crisis was the original decision to reduce the numbers of adjunct faculty members. It was at this point the President and Vice President for Academic Affairs should have been intuitive and understood that there was to be controversy, anger, confusion over people getting removed from their employment, even if that employment was a one year contract. All crisis events in the future would emanate from the one directive from the Regents to reduce adjunct faculty load, and thus the window of opportunity, noted in Fink's definition of crisis, was created. Inasmuch as there were no preliminary crisis plans, and no anticipation of crisis, KSU incurred some very serious damage.

In fairness to KSU administrators, there are circumstances in which no amount of political savvy or intuitive executive handling can deflect such a crisis. People who get terminated from their employment, no matter how dreadful an employee he is or no matter how temporary or short-term their employment might be, will profess injury and litigate in the face of all odds and all reason. In the modern work environment, people are litigious, and claim "victim status" under many circumstances. If you are a manager of an organization, there is a strong likelihood you will face some type of discrimination suit in your lifetime. Learning to deal with issues of this nature is what crisis management is all about.

### *Methods of Crisis Evaluation*

Organizations constantly risk creating elements of crisis and should analyze their operations accordingly. There are several fundamental crisis management methods by which this analysis made be performed. In Fink's 4-point model, a comprehensive crisis communication plan will include several important elements, including *crisis forecasting and crisis probability analysis*(41-54), the formation of *crisis management teams*, and the adoption of a *crisis management strategy* (54-66). Additionally, there are principles of media operations critical to crisis response that should be explored.

### *Crisis Forecasting and Probability*

Whether the crisis event is a manmade or act-of-God-type event, precrisis causal elements are important topics to understand and should be vital to a crisis strategic plan. Fink described this process in some detail although many scholars and authors note the importance of assessment of crisis factors in an organization (Fink 37). He characterizes the important aspects of his model as the correlation between the potential strength of a crisis event and probability factors that form the *crisis impact value*. Johnson and Sellnow, quoting Weick, identified this type of correlation as, "Low probability/ high consequence events that threaten the most fundamental goals of an organization" (54). Fink established a model correlating probability and topical analysis (Fink 36-46).

The objective is to itemize the issues that might create a crisis and then evaluate their potential for damage. Fink uses the terms *crisis intensity* (CI) values,

*probability values* (P), and the *crisis impact value* (CIV). Crisis intensity weighs how intense an issue might become, probability measures the likelihood of such an event happening and the CIV correlates the two measurements ( $CIV=P/CI$ ).

Probability factors involve an assessment of causal elements as to the likelihood of the occurrence of crisis events. Management analyzes a list of these causal elements and, in their best guess, attempts to determine the probability of their occurrence and the extent of impact. Of course, both the CI and the P factors are made using human assessment; therefore, there always remains a margin for error. However; the final assessment will be a useful value in determining an overall CIV that will aid in planning. Clearly, determination of a CIV is localized to a given organization.

To use a drastic example, there would be no need for a business that manufacturer's latex gloves to worry about a ship running aground on a sandbar, as might a steamship company. The CIV would be  $P/CI = 0$ . Conversely, executives of an airline company would be foolish not to assign an air crash involving fatalities with a very high CIV, because even though the probability is low, the crisis intensity is astronomical.

In a less dramatic circumstance, the latex glove company management might consider such issues as 1) overheating in the storage warehouse causing a breakdown in the integrity of the latex, or 2) losing shipments due to distribution problems. In determination of CIV for this latex company, in the first situation, the CI might be 8 and the probability 3, or a CIV of  $3/8=.375$ ; and in the next situation the CIV might

be 8 and the probability 5, or a CIV of  $5/8=.625$ , a much higher value. These assessments are important determinations of crisis management.

The objective of the CIV is to designate priorities on elements that might cause crisis events. As in the example noted above involving latex gloves, spending much time on minor issues would not be productive, such as leaky faucets in a billion dollar organization. The idea of a CIV is to gain an understanding and orchestrate a strategic plan for potentially serious operational issues.

Fink also establishes a process for giving a numerical value to the CI, from 1-10. He calls this a "*Crisis Intensity Scale*," and its purpose is simply to all management to assess issues or programs in the organization and ultimately to assign a CIV. He listed the following variables as possibly important to many businesses. This list is a reasonable glimpse at potential problems however; an analysis of this nature is entirely localized. Different organizations will arrive at different issues on the CI list. The following mention several items on a crisis intensity list:

1. Degree of Increasing Intensity: Would the event create a crisis become worse over time, or become relatively stable?
2. Scrutiny: How much scrutiny would be given the situation by regulators, by the media or by various stakeholders? How much of a problem would this be?
3. Interference with Operation: How much would the problem slow down the operations of the organization? Could it have the potential of stopping operations altogether?
4. Image. Would the issue have the potential of damaging your organization's image with the media and various stakeholders?



5. Bottom Line. Would the situation affect the revenue or service of your organization? How much might it be affected?

Fink noted that the next objective would be to assign numerical value to each of these issues and then to correlate them with the probability. Ultimately, each topic would be assigned a CIV that would allow administrators to take stock of all causal issues in an organization (Fink 36-46).

Coombs argued that, “Collecting information about issues, risks, and stakeholders is of no value unless it is analyzed to determine if the information contains prodromes. Crisis managers determine if the information really does suggest that a crisis is possible. The premise in finding warning signs early is to locate those that can significantly affect the organization and to take action to manage them” (31). Therefore, one of the more important purposes of the probability/crisis intensity factor exercise is to examine issues within an organization that might create a crisis event and to assess in practical terms its potential for harm.

These are relative values measuring variables within organizations—not strict science because much depends on timing, luck (or lack thereof), human involvement and other factors. The objective is to recognize where serious problems might be relevant, consider and implement rigorous strategies to steer clear of them, and construct plans for their eventuality.

In my research, I have noted a variety of concepts from scholars on issues involving the examination of the communication elements of crisis. Some concepts involve complex sets of computations and directives for crisis that perhaps exceed the

desire (or ability) of most administrators to follow. For the most part, current research offers pragmatic guidance applicable to many crisis situations, concepts applicable in a field that is both new and unknown to modern executives. An admonition to me from a vice president of a major Atlanta corporation indicated that if it does not apply to the bottom line, then it likely would not be done.

In considering the abstract, it is reasonable to assume that few companies would perform calculations and develop strategies on *every* issue identified in a crisis management plan. If a crisis team placed all prodromal issues in the to-do hopper, it would consume people and resources beyond the worth of it, and at some stage the work would indeed become an exercise in futility.

Many organizations constructing a crisis plan will hire consultants to examine operations and systems to establish policy. Not only does this practice bring outside opinions and expertise into an organization, it relieves managers and employees from administering a very tedious process. Moreover, the adage, “No man is a prophet in his own land,” often holds true. In many organizations, it takes an outside agent to point out issues that are already evident internally, however; perhaps no one has the authority, reason, or courage to bring it to the attention of administrators. For example, would the head of a crisis management team, perhaps a vice president or director of communications, determine that a CEO’s communication skills might undermine a crisis strategy when the media is on the doorstep? Chapter III, Part II, Development of a Crisis Plan, portrays a realistic and practical assessment of the elements of a crisis strategy, and provides more detailed discussion of the development of an organizational vulnerability analysis.

*Crisis Management Teams* (See Chapter III, Part II for additional discussion on the formation and work of a crisis management team)

A crisis management team is a group of people assigned by the CEO that meets regularly in a corporate or organizational setting to establish crisis management plans, provide for a crisis communication strategy, conduct crisis forecasting analysis and to oversee the implementation of a crisis management plan in the event of a crisis. Several issues are involved in establishing crisis management teams. According to King, quoting Coombs, “A crisis management team is a cross-functional group of people within the organization who have been designated to handle any crisis” (236).

#### *Crisis Management Team Composition*

The CMT generally includes the CEO, the chief information officer, the financial administrator, the production manager and other officers or staff who might be directly involved in some type of crisis at the time of crisis. Typically, there is some fluidity in a team as a means of responding to a variety of situations. For example, with a natural gas provider, it would be logical for the CMT to have an engineer of some type to provide technical guidance and provide engineering solutions. The group should always have specialists, but the core group should be composed of executives who have the ability to think and work independently and who represent senior management.

*Setting of Objectives.* The CMT establishes limits and ranges of authority for itself and its members. It establishes a formal spokesperson and an alternate. The CMT will also set rules of order for the various stages of crisis. ‘Rules’ such as these should be decided upon from the very first meeting with designated backups when the situation requires.

It provides direction on the order of events, communication strategy, wordsmithing of media releases, and response to internal and external audiences. It assists the communication director in determining the role, if any, that the Website might play. One or more members of the CMT assesses first events or signals indicating a problem, and determines when or if to call the crisis management team into place and their initial assignments. Many organizations have crisis management teams available on a “will call” basis. Such a dedication to the task enables fluid decisionmaking and rapid response to emergency situations. Some organizations have CMT’s that are ongoing committees, meeting on a regular basis to discuss and conduct business.

Some literature suggests that the CMT look at “what if” scenarios, as a means of engaging in role play situations. Fink (36, 37) describes a cognitive process for decisionmaking using a set of “what if” scenarios. The CMT would theorize a proposed crisis, and then diagram the evolution of the crisis using some of the concepts described in this dissertation. In essence, crisis elements are placed on a table and dissected—they become a technique with mechanics and process. “By planning for types of crises by crisis category, the comprehensive crisis management plan deals with the mechanics of the crisis in order to save precious time for the crisis

management team which will have to deal with the content of the crisis” (Fink 56). As Burnett also surmised, “The sensitivity of an information system can be more formally enhanced by initiating a “vulnerability audit. Such an exercise can be organized on a functional (e.g., department), product, or customer basis and involves the periodic identification of potential threats. In the course of completing the vulnerability audit, the threat’s ‘likelihood of occurrence,’ and ‘consequence severity’ is usually also gauged. Vulnerability audits produce many benefits. They make managers more environmentally sensitive and enhance critical thinking skills by encouraging the development of ‘what if’ questions” (484).

The CMT also sets policy in dealing with a hostile press. A CMT will delve into the vital question of the authority of the communication officer to make decisions independent of the president of the organization and of the team itself, a factor often considered vital in successful crisis management models. While there are circumstances in which crisis management is successful either with or without independent communications officers, there is evidence that when organizations give the person who determines communication strategy a strong and independent role, the organization is better served (Millar & Heath 313).

During routine operating periods and when the organization is not reacting to crisis events, the CMT might examine a number of issues while setting the parameters of crisis policy. The CMT might look at past crises or case histories that were handled poorly or successfully. The “what ifs” would examine other scenarios to examine for better methodology. These are the times in which corporate and

individual self reflection is involved, led in part by the CMT, and in part by other members of the senior staff of an organization that has been through the crisis.

The CMT might itemize a list of questions for senior staff, and especially those involved in the organization with crisis responsibilities. Did we do well in this circumstance? How could we have better handled the television reporters? What were the indicators of the crisis situation? Could we have averted the crisis by using other strategies and other tactics?

The CMT would examine damage control issues. Who assesses the damage? Is a crisis management plan necessarily a damage control plan? Fink suggests that “some crisis management is nothing of the kind. It is damage control.” But he also reasoned that damage control and crisis management are different issues requiring different tactics. On occasion, he reasons that damage control is the best available strategy, because it is the only thing left to do. The distinction is that crisis management begins well ahead of the crisis, even during times of no real or perceived crisis.

Crisis management is a strategy requiring people, effort, time and money and internal/external rhetorical communications. Damage control is often dealing with the aftermath of having no crisis management plan. Other authors suggest that damage control involves manipulation of the various affiliated discourse communities and their intrinsic information flow—internal to internal and internal to external (see Chapter III, Part I: Messaging To, From, and Within a Discourse Community).

Thus, we can reason that an important part of crisis management involves a systematic approach involving the structural arrangement of officials into a crisis

management team, an assessment of *prodromal* elements in an organization (vulnerability analysis), and an assignment of relative values to understand issues that might cause a crisis, given proper conditions for their development. Yet my research also acknowledges the fact that crisis management does not exist in a vacuum and cannot reasonably be effective as a reactive strategy alone. In other words, crisis management is not an abstract methodology; it should be tied to practical issues in an organization. Moreover, the purpose of a crisis plan is not simply to be able to effectively react to a crisis event, it involves a strategy to better understand the efficiency of the organization. This involves an examination of both short and long-term communication issues.

#### *Long-term versus Short-term Communication*

One of the most important issues involved in crisis communication is the ability to manage the organizational discourse community during non-crisis periods so that messaging is efficient and effective during crisis events. Referring to crisis planning, Ulmer wrote, "If organizations are going to be successful, they need to look beyond just their stockholders and expand their view of critical relationships" (591). Heath reasoned that a progressive corporate crisis strategy must include strategy to examine and integrate communication with all stakeholders. Such a strategy, "Stresses the importance of developing strong precrisis relationships with stakeholders, arguing that organizations should focus on building mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders and focus on an appropriate sense of corporate responsibility in their precrisis communication."

Yet, Ulmer also concluded, “Much of the research on crisis management illustrates the tendency for organizations to emphasize their own concerns over those of stakeholders. Their communication is largely focused on legal concerns and typically results in denials of responsibility and lack of useful information to stakeholders. These types of responses have been widely criticized (Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Fink, 1986; Markus & Goodman, 1991; Susskind & Field, 1996; Ulmer & Sellnow; 1997).

Corporations such as Dow Corning, Union Carbide, and the tobacco industry have employed such self-confident responses and suffered public image problems, prolonged legal wrangling, and postponed crisis resolution. Feuerstein's response is an excellent alternative example of crisis communication that does not narrowly focus the company's economic concerns ahead of the welfare of internal and external stakeholders. Clearly, managers should engage crisis situations with an expanded viewpoint of how these events affect their greater stakeholders and resist the desire to focus solely on stockholders' needs” (598).

As discussed earlier in this dissertation, strategic planning for crisis is often not a priority for organizations. The same seems to hold true for examining and maintaining efficient communication systems to all stakeholders. Research shows that communication is a critical element of crisis planning; therefore an examination of communication systems in an organization is important to a crisis strategy. If there has been adequate attention to the development of efficient vertical and horizontal communication, the promotion of positive and beneficial relationships externally, and an empowerment of competent and savvy individuals in key positions, research



shows that both the intensity and chance of crisis are diminished. If these discourse elements have not been on the agenda, employees are cautious of or inadvertently restricted from engaging in information dissemination or retrieval. This often occurs because of their distrust of or inability to effectively utilize the communication network for messaging. The results often result in lost information or misinformation.

For example, in this dissertation we examined the example of the Space Shuttle Challenger accident that technically occurred because of an engineering malfunction. However; it became evident in Congressional testimony that the technical problems were caused by communication glitches inhibiting efficient messaging between employees, consultants, and management.

The communication network in effect was neither efficient nor healthy—and was destined for some kind of breakdown. Messaging between key players was such a problem, it not only influenced the efficiency of the flight (it crashed), there were also significant anomalies in crisis response following the loss of the space shuttle. “NASA’s comprehensive crisis communication plan mandated a response within 20 minutes of a crisis. Yet it took more than six hours for the agency to release its first statement following the explosion of the Challenger. The communication culture within NASA didn’t match the requirements of its crisis plan” (Marra 468).

Further illustrating a damaged or (unhealthy) communication environment is the example of a crisis involving the death of a basketball player at the University of Maryland in 1986. The college was vilified in the media not only for the tragic events involving the young man, but also that the information flow from the

institution was slow to come and emanating from several contradictory sources. In this case, the media had no information and this substantially compounded the situation and the negative effects to the institution.

Subsequent analysis showed the communications officer at the university had no authority to talk directly to the media and that all releases had to be approved by the President, a vice president, and the legal affairs officer. By the time the media received information, it was too old to use and a hostile relationship was created between the media and the university. Three things were apparent at the university. First, the process of information flow in the organization was inefficient with a convoluted administrative process that was overly influenced by cautious legal operatives. Second, the internal discourse community was ineffectual, with elements of “turf management” and distrust among key members apparently influencing process. And third, the chief communication officer was not part of the management team, thus allowing decisions involving the flow of information to be made by individuals not in touch with the media or with insufficient experience in public relations. “A dean at the University of Maryland (and a former newspaper managing editor) said it typically took a three hour cabinet meeting to decide what information they would release on any given day in the crisis.” Appropriate venues for information dispersal were disregarded in favor of higher placed personnel who were presumably out of the communication loop (Marra 470). This crisis is reminiscent of crisis situations at Kennesaw State University, noted in this dissertation.

An example of a more positive outcome that resulted from an efficient communication environment occurred in 1990 at AT&T when they experienced a

long distance network crisis.. In this situation, the long distance service of AT&T went down for a variety of reasons, with extreme media pressure building on a daily basis. However; AT&T handled the crisis in a masterful way, according to numerous experts on the subject. Marra noted that in interviews with senior staff involved in the crisis, “The communications operatives at AT&T were operating within the underlying communication principles they use day-to-day” (466). Walter Murphy, Director of Corporate Information during the crisis stated, “There simply was no discussion of what it was we ought to do. We just would immediately, as we normally do, answer press calls with as many of the facts as we then had them. There was no thought given to try and stonewall nor to try sugarcoating this thing...this is just the normal way that AT&T public relations and media relations operate” (451). In this crisis, senior leadership of AT&T also credited the independence of the communications office for many of the successes of the crisis management. Unlike at the University of Maryland, senior management delegated authority to the communications officer, a policy that promoted quick decisions, easy access by and to the media, and a sense of personal responsibility that promoted excellence. Marra concluded, “The underlying communication culture of an organization and the level of autonomy or power of the public relations department within an organization can easily prevent (or enhance) practitioners from implementing the best crisis communication plan” (464).

For the rare instance of manmade or act of God catastrophes, the results of crisis will also be mitigated through efficient and effective communications. Cheney and Vibbert wrote about the “Instrumentality of established stakeholders relations and

channels of communication,” suggesting there are many factors that influence public reaction to crisis and various successful crisis management techniques. Again, Heath wrote, “Research on crisis management suggests that managers should develop mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders prior to a crisis” (9).

Egelhoff and Sen wrote, “There is substantial literature supporting and describing the distinction between routine and non-routine information processing” (454). They concluded, “Routine information processing deals with inputs that are frequent and homogeneous. It transforms them under conditions of high certainty and assumes that goals and means-ends relationships are well known...Nonroutine information processing deals with inputs that are either unique or infrequent and heterogeneous. It transforms them under varying degrees of uncertainty about goals or means-ends relationships or both” (454). Their research points to the need to understand the difference between information processing during crisis and non-crisis periods. They describe a gap that frequently exists between messaging during routine and non-routine information-processing periods (crisis and non-crisis). During non-crisis periods, information flows smoothly and the converse is true during crisis periods. Bridging that gap is an important element for crisis communication strategy.

Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer concluded, “Information distortion by lower-level employees is an additional impediment to communication of crisis signals and risk messages...subordinates tend to tell their superiors things that reflect positively and avoid those things that reflect negatively” (111). This impasse in vertical communication is often a factor in both crisis planning and crisis management. No one ever wants to give bad news to the boss.

Communication strategy, therefore, directly influences the health of the discourse community, all of the lines of messaging from and to an organization, and is an essential and fundamental management philosophy in a crisis management plan. A healthy discourse community has the ability to inhibit the incidence of crisis events and mitigate damage from crises when they occur. Egelhoff and Sen wrote, “Generally, such crises cannot be completely averted, but sometimes the effect of the crisis can be mitigated by action taken after a warning and also by effective post-crisis action” (461). Most crisis communication researchers place the examination and planning of vertical and horizontal messaging in this context for action.

Crisis management principles are important to the organization’s well being regardless of the type of organization, whether manufacturer, service corporation, non-profit organization, charitable organization or educational institution. Crisis management should be as fundamental to the organization as sound accounting principles. Crisis management is both a proactive and a reactive methodology. My research leads me to conclude that business management, crisis management, and crisis communication are very nearly synonymous.

### *Summary*

Crisis planning seems to be a very fluid objective in the majority of organizations. Some executives believe that crises are inevitable and planning for them is an important objective. Others believe that that planning for them is difficult and possibly useless. Some say crisis planning is simply a part of routine operational planning that does not require special attention. Smiar and Child wrote,

“Administrators rarely discuss or process the crises that occur in their own agencies”

(2). Research shows that executives of large corporations are reluctant to formulate crisis plans, even when they have been through one or more. It seems implausible, given the many pitfalls of the business world, that many executives do not embrace even the most rudimentary fundamentals of crisis planning.

Granted there are many examples in history indicating this recalcitrance to be acceptable. It is interesting to note that following the catastrophe of the Exxon Valdez, with Exxon Corporation vilified from all corners of the globe, the company enjoyed their most profitable period in history in the decade following the accident. Perhaps this has more to do with the consumer's overwhelming need for gas than anything good or bad with the company. Did the tanker spill forever tarnish the name of the company? Probably. Was there an implication on corporate revenues? In the short term, yes, the profits took a dive. In the long term, no, the profits soared. Perhaps American memory is poor, especially given the enormous catastrophes of the past ten years. Most people will remember the accident, yet they still pull their car up to the Exxon gas pump if the station is well located or if the gas is a penny or two cheaper.

However; many organizations succeed or fail on reputations, and assuredly incur extremely damaging effects, from crisis. Strategies to maintain these reputations and minimize damage generally fall within the sphere of public relations professionals, however; there is ample research to show that crisis impact often exceeds the ability to recover using traditional public relations efforts. Organizations that plan for, and effectively handle crises often have an easier time following the

crisis doing whatever they do. Those that fail often are diminished in their operations and many simply die.

Stakeholders include the management, staff, board members, stockholders, the public, regulators, etc. These groups have an enormous impact on the success of an organization. Therefore, an important objective of a crisis communication plan is to achieve positive relationships and efficient communication patterns with stakeholders. Research shows that in doing so organizations seem to get the benefit of the doubt during crises. The reverse is that organizations that have not developed positive relationships among stakeholders often get vilified, with the overall impact being much worse than necessary. Granville, discussing Ray's conclusion, suggests, "Crisis *management* begins with the organization's culture. The presence of arrogance or lack of common sense in an organization's culture can lead to a crisis" (242).

Crisis communication plans play an important role in both short and long term strategies of organizations for both crisis and non-crisis modes of operation. Planning methods include the formation of crisis management teams, determining the probability of crisis events, establishing crisis communication plans and most importantly promoting long term relationships with stakeholders. All of these tasks and projects should be undertaken with the organizational culture in mind. Creating a healthy discourse community is an important element in crisis management to allow the organization more stability and more resilience.

## CHAPTER II: CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN CONTEXT

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### *Part V: Crisis Communication in Context with Media and Public Relations: The Role of the Chief Communications Officer*

Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer concluded, “The study of organizational crisis is inherently multidisciplinary, drawing on management, organizational theory, political science, sociology, and psychology. In addition, specialized areas have grown, areas such as hazardous-waste management, logistics, food science, medicine, counseling, decision making, agriculture, and engineering” (16). Based on my research, I would add to this list public relations, media, journalism, writing composition, and other fields involving organization-public interaction.

Typically, the role of the chief communications officer (CCO) involves knowledge of and skill in all of the above, with key assignments in communication that branch across these disciplines. Thus, an individual responsible for internal and external messaging has broad responsibilities that serve the organization as part of pre- and post-crisis discourse and as an element of long-term strategies in crisis management.

Numerous scholars have examined case studies of crises, observing that the success or failure of crisis management efforts often depend upon the ability of the CCO to function effectively in the organization (Note examples of AT&T and University of Maryland for illustration of communications’ officers’ roles in their respective crises, in Chapter II, Part IV, Long-term versus Short-term Communication).



Of special importance seems to be that the individual 1) has a significant role on the crisis management team (CMT) in the development of policy; 2) has a direct line relationship with the head of the organization; and, 3) has independent decisionmaking authority to act quickly and decisively during crisis events.

Within this discussion will be an examination of the role of the CCO as a key player in advising the head of the organization in strategic measures related to internal and external stakeholders. As noted in Chapter II, Part IV, current research in public relations clearly associates the development of relationships with successful crisis management. However; as discussed by Kent & Taylor, Ulmer, Caillouet, Harris, & Watkins and others, the development of “external prior relationships,” should be accomplished in tandem with strategies for insuring efficiency in various systems of communication within the organization. The CCO’s role as an organizational is important during both the planning and implementation of crisis communication strategies.

#### *Historical Role of the CCO; New Functions in the New Age*

History appears to have no particular milestone announcing the arrival of crisis management, crisis communication, or crisis events, per se. Since “crisis management” is a relatively new field, the origination of the discipline of crisis communication is a function solely for those who examine it in a scholarly manner. Was the fall of the Roman Empire a crisis? Yes, assuredly in the minds of the Romans and perhaps countless others in the following millennia...however; do we attribute that event as one of the first crisis events...probably not!

It is interesting to note that the first authors on the issue of crisis management and crisis communication were former or current public relations experts who perceived crisis issues as requiring special attention beyond the traditional scope of public relations. There was an initial examination of more efficient and effective ways of dealing with non-routine events occurring in various types of organizations. For example, Fink developed one of the first crisis management models based on his experiences in handling public relations crises of glamorous Hollywood stars in the 1990's. While his training was as a practitioner rather than an academic, his models of crisis management are often referenced in scholarly examinations of crisis management.

Most crisis events, as perceived by the public in the past hundred years were either wars or momentous national events, such as the crash of the Hindenberg or the sinking of the Titanic. Perhaps these and other tragedies occurred in more innocent times in which the media examined the losses rather than such issues as who was at fault and who gained from the crisis. But assuredly, along the way, risks for organizations incurring crisis became greater. In today's age of hyper-media, it has become extremely difficult for organizations to control internal information. Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer reasoned, "Trigger events often prompt strong emotional and psychological responses" (112), in reference to media issues that cause crisis. My research (and experience) prompts me to believe that the media actively seeks these trigger events using any possible tactic. In discussing issues of ethics and the media, Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer reasoned that the media plays an important role as a

watchdog in uncovering organizational wrongdoing, however; “Often crosses the line between serving as the public’s watchdog and engaging in deceptive reporting” (58).

In modern-era management, information travels faster with broader distribution. Reporting has become more aggressive and penetrating. With the rapid creation of wealth in the last half of the century, more people have vested interests in more organizations. Philanthropy has grown, multinational companies and services have become commonplace and the skill of management has evolved into serious business whose decisions impact many people. Decisions once made under the cloak of the boardroom now find their way to stockholders within hours via dedicated cable channels and the Internet. Perceived crises become real when information becomes available in the public arena and when organizations lose the ability to control that information.

Depending on the size and type of an organization, the function of the CCO traditionally has been to write and release media responses, media pitches, information publications, and perhaps assist in writing copy for marketing, advertising and public relations. It is not unusual for the function of communication to reside within the office of the administrator of the organization or perhaps to be elevated as one of the vice presidents. However, communication functions are also sometimes relegated to sub-management levels and the first to go when budget times get tough. Such is the life of the employees who do not produce the cash generating product or service.

Many of the functions in a typical CCO’s job form the basis for crisis communication and crisis management. Media pitches, media releases, public

relations, publications, public relations, Web content management, and management of GUI (graphical user interface) are all important (and traditional) interfaces with stakeholders and the public. These tasks require specialized knowledge and often a CCO comes from a related occupation, such as a journalist, writer, public relations specialist, etc.

Yet, along with traditional methods of communication, the CCO has the opportunity to play a leadership role in crisis management, with or without the formal nod from the chairman or the presence of a crisis management team. I want to discuss the types of tasks of the CCO and his office from the perspective of traditional messaging, and when appropriate relate these mechanisms to crisis preparedness. The crisis management functions are discussed in greater detail in Chapter III, Part III, Development of a Media Relations Model.

- **Media pitches:** A traditional method of messaging in which the CCO proactively sends information to the media and public on a particular issue. This mechanism is especially important in discussing new products, new services, information on employees or personnel or the organization. Usually, media pitches are sent in the form of hard copy releases however; in the recent past are frequently special links on the organizational Webpage. Crisis management mechanisms include information releases during crises to inform various publics on people and events in an organization during a crisis. This is a typical method of releasing information that carry the organization's message, and

may be released through the Web or by hard copy mailed or faxed to reporters.

- **Media responses:** Also a traditional means of messaging, primarily aimed at the press. The media asks a question or poses an issue in the local newspaper or other media and the organization responds by way of a response. This response may be in the form of a telephone call, written press release, or again as a link on the Webpage. In crises, media responses are a typical method of reacting to a newspaper article or other form of media.
- **Public relations:** Many CCOs are often the primary coordinating individual in an organization responsible for public relations. If an organization is large and diverse enough to support both public relations and communications, then the two divisions should be working closely together on important messaging objectives. Typically, the public relations officer oversees government and community affairs functions both proactive and reactive, keeping up with actions of the local garden clubs, civic clubs and a host of other community business that might affect the organization. It is not unusual for employees who have the function of the public relations official to be the first line of defense and the primary officer in an organization having to do with external activities. In a crisis, the public relations personnel are the primary liaisons to stakeholders and the media. During times of non-crisis, the PR people facilitate

stakeholder messaging, relationship building, and connectivity in a variety of ways.

- **Publications:** The CCO has responsibilities for all the organizational publications, including newsletters, annual reports, information flyers, or bulletins. While these documents tend to be cyclical and not conducive to the immediacy of crisis communication, routine information sent via organizational publications offer much opportunity for communication with stakeholders and the creation of favorable relationships. Many CCO's have long lists of recipients in the media for publications extolling company virtues and of the accomplishments of staff and management. In the modern era, publications are also sent via "blast" emails, meaning the documents arrive in email at virtually unlimited destinations.
- **Web content management:** In modern organizations, the CCO is often the manager of the content and look of the Web. This means that various departments of the organization use the CCO to assist them in moving information around the organization and from the organization to stakeholders and the public. While it is unusual for the CCO to manage the product or sales advertising content of the organization's Web, it is not unusual for the CCO to set and administer the standards by which all divisions place their information on the Web. Typically, the CCO would have GUI specialists (graphical user interface) under

their responsibility who administer Web-based themes and overall look.

- Information processing/strategic planning: Typically, the President of an organization does not seek advice from engineering personnel on how to deal with reporters, how to respond to community activists or what to say to regulators. Granted there are technical issues that may require some input from engineers, however; the CEO would have the technical personnel working with the CCO's office providing the wordsmithing for the message to be placed in various documents. Often, the CCO is the primary information-processing manager who assists the management team with communication strategy for both internal and external purposes.

Considering activities and opportunities of the CCO in relationship building, it is beneficial to adopt the *functions* of a crisis communication mode of management throughout all areas of administration. In so doing, it allows an administrator to understand and define strategic messaging. This does not mean that *all* messaging should be monitored—that would be impractical and unethical. However; by orchestrating a rigorous analysis of formal communication, especially in a large organization, strategic intelligence may be obtained as a means of understanding weakness, and of exploiting strengths. This might apply to strategic communication between the organization and various governmental agencies, political groups, neighborhood organizations, environmental groups, the media or others stakeholders.

An example of this would be a directive by an administrator for all directors to identify their respective contacts with local reporters, along with recent communications with these reporters (see Chapter III, Development of a Media Operations Model). A number of questions may be asked and benefits achieved in this exercise, such as 1) does the reporter attempt to gain information from multiple sources in the organization; 2) when discussing organizational issues do the directors know that others in the organization are speaking to the same reporter; 3) are there attempts internally to coordinate a message? The alternative to this type of analysis is to conduct business without the benefit of knowing how messaging is conducted with the media throughout an organization and to be reactive when problematic issues arise.

Does this practice infringe on a directors or employees rights to speak freely with the media? It may infringe on personal rights of self expression, but it is entirely appropriate for directives to be sent out to all employees to strategically align conversations with reporters. It is an especially appropriate management prerogative recognizing the power of the media and the potential damage unstructured discussion with journalists might cause.

Unless there are overriding reasons to the contrary, all contact with the media should be coordinated through the chief communications officer in an organization. This applies also to the Chairman or President of an organization. There are several advantages for media communications to flow through the CCO, including:

1. Having a central point of contact in the organization for all media. For example, if an engineering director receives an inquiry from a reporter concerning a



Freon refrigerant leak in a company facility presumably endangering the health of employees, he would not be responsible for responding. Instead, the call would be referred to the CCO—who hopefully would already have been briefed on the incident.

2. Allows the President to make use of the CCO as a shield in certain circumstances where it might prove to be of benefit. For example, if the local cable channel receives an anonymous call from a company employee who has alleged violations of the Affirmative Action Act, and a news team is sent to the company, the President's office could easily escort the news reporter to the CCO, who could buy some time for the President before a response is made;

3) It establishes the CCO as a figure of authority in the organization, especially when a crisis event occurs. For example, if the CCO is not the coordinating point for the media, employees, members of the administration and closely-held stakeholders might feel the need to respond to the media. With a CCO in place who has the authority to make decisions and respond to media inquiries, these same stakeholders would feel obligated not to make statements of any kind to the media. Inappropriate comments or discussions to the media without coordination with the CCO would be grounds for severe personnel action or dismissal.

This is not to say that the Chairman of an organization must constantly be in crisis mode of operation. There would be many disadvantages of this type of management. However; in seeking more efficient lines of communication both internally and externally, the result will be a more efficient operating process.

As noted in Chapter II, Part III, Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer refer to the reinvention of an organization into the modern information landscape as a process of “corporate epistemology.” This term reflects the overwhelming task of operating any type of organization in an environment where every employee and all organizational procedures are media stories and lawsuits in waiting. This is an almost cathartic revelation that should be the stated rite of passage of all organizations.

*The Chief Communications Officer as a Key Player in the Crisis Communication Process*

Various elements and phases of crisis demand responsibilities of many players in an organization. Few organizations have a job title called *crisis communications manager*, *crisis manager*, *crisis media director*, or *crisis public relations consultant*. While many organizations have legal affairs officers, public relations directors, media affairs directors or government affairs managers, there are few such jobs with the term *crisis* in them. It is an interesting irony in organizational dynamics, because much of what may be said about legal management may also be said about crisis management. Their role is to plan against negative contingencies and to exercise damage control when a problem occurs. Moreover, like legal counsels, key staff personnel involved in crisis management have ongoing responsibilities that theoretically should be routine and ongoing assignments. Consistently, however; crisis management and crisis communication tend to be on an “as-needed” basis. Given that crisis management is rarely a priority among business executives, its lesser status in relation to legal advisement is not surprising.

Like standard legal or accounting issues, crisis issues are pervasive and intrusive; they often cut across the entire organization and the outcomes may be substantial, immensely expensive and damaging. They touch people and divisions across the organization and affect morale. Yet crisis management rarely has the same perceived value to administrators as legal or financial management. Additionally, a communication manager seldom has the authority and the status allowed of the legal counsel. As Burnett stated, "There is now sufficient evidence that organizations are not effectively integrating crisis management into corporate strategy" (476). Unfortunately, it would appear that organizations tend to keep to the production of their product or service and procrastinate delving into planning for countless eventualities that might put them out of business. This is, of course until a crisis occurs and the legal counsels become more evident in the situation.

Within the context of Fink's four stages of crisis (20-25), and discussion of a crisis management team, there are many employees having some responsibility in a crisis situation, including the president/CEO, chief fiscal officer, legal counsel, VP for public relations, director of security, VP for human resources and others. But typically, the public relations or corporate communications officer in an organization is a key officer in the success or failure of a crisis situation. It is, however; a risky professional endeavor. According to Burnett, "Many PR managers may lose their credibility and, perhaps, their jobs, because of negative results. This despite following a company-prescribed process" (476).

The explanation for this phenomenon is complicated. Why should a manager lose either his position or his credibility in performing his job? The answer lies in the complexity of the situation, its charged nature, and sheer luck (or lack of it).

Crisis management involves situations in which there are increased stakes and reduced time for decisionmaking, especially when information has become public. The circumstances often necessitate actions to minimize mistakes and mitigate losses. Much of the success or failure of crisis management is dependent upon prior strategic planning, a dedicated process, and intuitive thinking. Placing these tasks within the responsibility of a single employee is a formidable assignment, and very risky for that individual.

We have already considered the issue that organizations consistently defy odds by procrastinating or never planning for crisis. Added to this is an extremely difficult and professionally challenging task of, as both Burnett and Fink concluded, assessing the vulnerability of organizational systems. It is reasonable to assume that any vulnerability testing is not a happy occasion in a division or department—much less in the office of the chairman. Finally, when all the testing and planning is completed, the rest falls to fortune. Because the very nature of a crisis is something akin to chaos (Seeger), the path to the recovery stage is full of pitfalls and uncertainties. It is completely rational to assume that the person in the crisis manager's position—most often the CCO or the head of public relations—is in a very precarious situation.

A fully prepared communication manager, therefore, must be adept and skillful in his/her trade, a leader in the company in terms of developing a long-term

internal strategy on roles and responsibilities in crisis management, and be able to be intuitive and flexible in managing a crisis situation. Even in the best of circumstances, the communication officer, out front in times of crisis, often puts his or her job on the line as a function of the crisis situation. This is a situation that should be better understood by all parties.

Marra noted, "Communication is an important element in almost all successful crisis management efforts. Organizations or individuals that communicate poorly during crises often make bad situations worse" (461). Marra concludes that there is much value in strategic planning within an organization, especially in developing a crisis plan and forming a team. "Almost all of the research in crisis public relations focuses on the technical role of communication during a crisis...additional variables strongly influence how well an organization communicates during a crisis" (461). However; he also cautions that dependence on a crisis plan or a crisis team is not always the most effective preventative mechanism against long-term crisis. Public relations practitioners, therefore, he argues, need to expand their technical communication mindset to consider variables that appear to predict excellent crisis public relations practice more accurately than the mere presence of a crisis public relations plan. Grunig, reasoned, "Public relations departments do not exist in isolation...conditions in and around organizations affect the structure and practice of the public relations functions" (465). Conrad and Poole similarly concluded, "When situations and symbolic acts are ambiguous, employees have much more freedom to reinterpret them and act in ways that differ from what the leader intended" (122). In other words, companies with communication plans where

the authority to act resides in a place known by everyone [the public relations department, for example] is more stable, and less likely to produce a warrior mentality.

Thus, communications managers must be allowed access to all levels of an organization for the purpose of crisis prevention, strategic planning for potential crises, and interacting with and reacting to crisis situations. Moreover, they require involvement in key decisionmaking when crises are not occurring and should have substantial influence across the spectrum of organizational activities before, during, and after a crisis. Often, a communicator can provide wordsmithing and public relations strategic thinking in many types of settings in which crises are currently occurring or situations in which they might occur.

Forman noted in discussing the need for the CCO to be in the inner circle of management, “To acquire such a position—a seat at the CEO’s table—also means knowing how to use data and analysis in support of a point of view about the company’s future—and not just to present data and analysis for its own sake” (285). This means that CCO’s must be given access to critical information, and the authority to use the information to achieve company objectives; but they also must be able to intuitively correlate information and mission.

Penrose’s research concluded, “A communication strategy should strive to achieve the fastest delivery of the most accurate information available...achieved by establishing a communication protocol, selecting and training a company spokesperson, identifying key audiences and key messages, and deciding on the most appropriate method of communication before a crisis occurs” (158). It is also

noteworthy that a number of researchers have found correlation between a crisis and an organization's past history, its perceived integrity or contextual behavior. Coombs and Holliday wrote, "Crisis experts have stated that a favorable precrisis stakeholder relationship is an important and valuable asset to crisis management...once established, a relationship history and reputation are fairly stable [and] the stability may serve to deflect and reduce the negatives generated by a crisis from attaching themselves to the organization" (323, 324). In effect, crisis strategy is a long-term process facilitated by many members of an organization, but can be most effective when top officers orchestrate a concerted effort to assess vulnerabilities and prepare for exigencies of the business environment. The CCO or the public relations manager typically has the skills and often the responsibility to coordinate many of the crisis functions during the acute crisis stage. Fitzpatrick concluded, "As Forbes observes, management should look to its public relations executive to provide an ongoing assessment of how well the company is establishing the bonds of trust with its internal and external publics that are affected by its activities" (349). Botan and Soto wrote, "We might argue that the coming decade [2000-2010] will be a decade of strategic communication. A decade in which such communication becomes increasingly important to publics in developed countries, and because of the worldwide information revolution, to developed countries as well" (22). They discuss the public relations function as, "A planned and goal directed strategic campaign. Such campaigns are characterized by their intended role in positioning an organization or group to negotiate relationships with relevant environmental forces" (23). These statements are understood to mean that communication and information

exchange with aligned publics is growing in importance to organizations, and that public relations officers possess the skills to play a strategic communication function and vital leadership role in an organization.

A public relations or communications manager's role in an organization is often misunderstood and undervalued. This individual is not in production; is not in management per se; is not an attorney; is not a finance person or a human relations specialist. Many executives regard the role of the communications officer as being superfluous or unimportant. However; the communications officer is often the person most skilled at managing information flow to both internal and external publics before, during and after a crisis. According to the research noted in this dissertation, we can deduce that communications managers should have the following characteristics and responsibilities within their organizations:

1. Strong technical expertise with the ability to adapt to changing situations;
2. Access to and influence with key management in all areas of communication within the organization;
3. Ability to 'call the shots' in organizational communication; at a minimum to be involved in high level decisionmaking meetings when public relations, government affairs, media relations, publications or other issues involving communication are involved;
4. Involvement in all aspects of internal and external communications;
5. Authority to develop a long-term working relationship with the media on a broad range of communication and information issues.



6. Intuitive in strategic messaging to develop relationships with many types of stakeholders and publics.

In summary, the public relations manager or CCO brings all of these functions come into play. By allowing (or requiring) a communication officer to act at the highest level of authority and responsibility within an organization, management acknowledges the critical relationship between public relations and crises.

My research indicates suggests a strong recommendation for the continual presence of a high-level communication officer in all the stages and functions of effective crisis management. Research also indicates that an effective communication officer involved along the way has a greater opportunity to turn a negative crisis into a positive situation than without that involvement.

### *Hostile Media*

No discussion of crisis management and crisis communication would be complete without mention of issues involving hostile media. My characterization of the term “hostile media” involves aggressive journalists 1) who are intent on writing a story with or without the facts; 2) are willing and desirous of slanting facts to write their copy; and, 3) are intent on negative journalism—meaning the journalist’s intent is to indulge the negative side of a story rather than the positive.

The CCO’s development and management of crisis strategies is exceedingly complex *even without* the scrutiny of the media—as noted in discussions with

Chinese officials during training sessions in Beijing and Nanchang (Chapter II, Part II). All organizations have crises that require examination and strategic planning.

Yet, the media often presents an added level of accountability during crisis events because the journalists' objectives are typically not the same as the organization. Moreover, at a time in which focus by managers is on problems in the organization, journalists frequently require time and resources away from the focal point. When a reporter is especially hostile and aggressive—meaning he is attempting to circumvent established media process in an organization, he is working employee's statements against each other, or he is distorting facts—it makes the situation more difficult with even higher stakes. In these circumstances, every decision made by management is under the scrutiny of the media, with many publics judging decisionmaking. Center & Jackson concluded, "The media concentrate on reporting bad news—the errors, accidents, and scandals of human society" (207). The penchant for reporters to be *hostile* is exceedingly burdensome for CCO's, and is often characterized as being one of his most demanding responsibilities during crises. Cranberg wrote, "Every effort must be made to assure that the news content is accurate, free from bias, and in context, and that all sides are presented fairly. By omitting any explicit duty to inform readers that what they just read was erroneous, the code enables a news organization to be in compliance so long as bogus claims are reported accurately" (10). It comes as no surprise to many executives whose words have been incorrectly written that journalists tend to overlook the truth and write what might be of more interest to their readers.

Once I had a reporter stand silently next to me during a conversation I was having with a Senator on a delicate legislative issue in a crowded hall of the Capitol. I had worked with this reporter on several occasions, and while this person always raised my concern over his aggressive tactics, I paid little attention that he was standing beside me as I went about my business. It was, after all a private conversation using very hushed voices. There was no invitation for the reporter to engage in dialogue.

Later in the afternoon, the reporter called and asked me if I had any comment on the subject of my conversation with the Senator. He proceeded to play back a recording of my conversation that he had made without my knowledge. It turns out under state law that such a tape can be made when issues of a public nature are discussed. I expressed my opinion of his tactics in no uncertain words, and immediately telephoned the publisher of the paper—who was an acquaintance of mine. I recounted the incident only to have the publisher lecture me that what is said in public may be reported, and that his journalist, while perhaps being *a little over-zealous*, was simply getting a good story. In the newspaper the next day, the story had been diluted, probably as a result of my relationship with the publisher, however; in my mind still went way over the boundaries of proper reporting. Subsequent to this, I changed my tactics on private meetings.

While this dissertation in several locations addresses the need to develop prior relationships with the media and strategy involved in communication with media, developing tactics of dealing with hostile journalists remains a vital part of crisis training. Organizational spokespersons on the front line with reporters can present a

caring, accurate and common sense version of facts related to a crisis, or meetings with reporters can be confrontational and damaging.

Hostile reporters, in most cases do not involve personal vendetta against anyone—they just want a story, and they often are willing to slant copy to sensationalize their facts. In the field it is euphemistically called “spin,” and spin has been the basis for many crises and scandals. There are budding Bob Woodwards everywhere who want to twist the facts, glamorize the topic and smear reputations, just so they can get their copy read by the public—nothing personal. It is worthy of note that scandal sells quite well.

Millar & Irvine, in an empirical examination of crisis categories, itemized the following categories of crisis media issues for 1995-1996:

<u>Event</u>	<u>Number of Occurrences</u>
1. White collar crimes	2,147
2. Labor disputes	1,981
3. Mismanagement	1,345
4. Class action law suits	981
5. Catastrophes	784
6. Defects & recalls	699
7. Casualty accidents	576
8. Discrimination	554
9. Workplace violence	499
10. Environmental accidents	426
11. Financial damages	413
12. Hostile takeovers	360
13. Sexual harassment	342
14. Executive dismissals	335
15. Consumer actions	225
16. Whistleblower actions	198
Total	11,865

They also correlated the extent of media coverage to these events. The following figures represent the average number of media articles per crisis.

1. Labor	3.279
2. Sexual harassment	2.948
3. Hostile takeovers	2.449
4. Workplace violence	2.376
5. Whistleblowing actions	2.330
6. Financial damages	2.209
7. Defects & recalls	2.026
8. Catastrophes	1.989
9. Discrimination	1.972
10. Environmental accidents	1.942
11. Mismanagement	1.830
12. Class action lawsuits	1.820
13. Casualty accidents	1.817
14. White collar crimes	1.726
15. Consumer actions	1.692
16. Executive dismissals	1.634

Millar & Irvine concluded, “First, an organizational crisis will engender at least two original stories (stories/events mean =2.128) before either disappearing from the press or shifting to ‘aftershocks.’ By ‘aftershocks’ we mean additional crises for the organization in much the same way that new shocks follow major earthquakes...Second, some crisis events themselves generate more stories than do others” (7).

Suffice it to say that reporters have many categories of news to write about. But Millar & Irvine’s work is important in identifying first, the topics that journalists consider as “crises,” and second the topics most organizations needs to consider in their crisis management plans. While these topics are not inclusive of all categories, they are indicators of the relative news coverage on given events.

The CCO is typically the primary person responsible for being a spokesperson during a crisis. Therefore, it is reasonable that the CCO be skilled in dealing with the

media and that if others in his organization must speak to reporters that they also understand the ground rules involved. There are numerous training mechanisms for dealing with media, and especially hostile reporters, including role play, live video/audio recordings for playback and analysis, and study of case studies involving media interactions. One of the most important methods of interviews is to rehearse responses prior to an interview with staff asking follow-on leading questions.

Some considerations currently in the crisis journalism market are appropriate for this discussion. First, I offer two assumptions: 1) Lead and bleed works—getting the viewing public’s attention can be gained through hostile reporting; and, 2) “Opponents of an issue will greet news coverage eagerly, glad to see objections raised and the issue move more prominently into public view” (Gunther & Chih-Yun 697). Gunther & Chih-Yun label refer to this phenomenon as “hostile media perception” and the “hostile media inference.”

The point of these assumptions is that what you do in front of a reporter makes a vast difference in how it is reported. While there is a great tendency for reporters to tag a story with their own personal bias or to slant copy toward a scandal, proper preparation and sound tactics can influence the outcome of the story. Some guidelines, as noted by PR consultant Jennifer Reingold:

1. “Know your objective, know your audience. It sounds easy, but it's really the hardest part of communications...You must know what you want to do before you can translate that into a clear message--so take some time to figure out your corporate strategy before, not after, someone asks you to distill it. Then make sure you know who you are talking to and what it is they want to hear.

2. If it's about a sweater, don't show up with a lamb. We are overwhelmed by information, so conveying a message that sticks is tougher than ever. If you can synthesize what you want to convey into a few key points, there's a better chance that those points will make it through the clutter. Using a triangle or a box to structure your message is more effective than talking points.
3. Overdo it...If you don't feel a little goofy, you're not doing enough. [The point of this is to show remorse, friendliness, etc., in front of a camera or reporter]
4. Make the first impression count. When there is a blank slate, the first thing written on it not only has an advantage but its shadow is always there... It's much easier to get it right from the start.
5. No rote repetition...The worst thing that someone can do now...is to look like they're on message. It now alienates and drives people away." An example is Al Gore's infamous "no controlling legal authority" press conference in 1997. He was blatantly on message and blatantly avoiding the issues on the table. You should make your point by responding to questions and finding several creative ways to do so, not by parroting one lousy sound bite by rote.
6. Sound bites can work...A good sound bite conveys a message immediately in a colorful way. It's also more likely to be remembered "So far the most popular sound bite of the year, and I didn't write it so I can't kvell on [boast about] it, was Paul O'Neill's criticism that President Bush was 'like a blind man in a room full of deaf people.'"

7. Answer the "who" question and the "ooh" question. Know first who's watching or listening. Then ask yourself what you can do to make them say, "Ooh, that's interesting!"
8. Tell the truth. if you try to hide a problem--or worse, deny it—you're going to get busted (right, Martha Stewart, Bill Clinton, Frank Quattrone?). This may sound strange coming from the mouth of someone who worked closely with President Clinton during the Lewinsky scandal, but Sheehan says that makes his point exactly. 'If you go out there and give false info,' he says. 'you're going to get clocked'" (Reingold 100-102)

Reingold's suggestions, a collection of information from public relations consultant Michael Sheehan, are on target, and comprehensive. While there are numerous experts on the subject, these eight tips summarize the intent of dealing with reporters during a crisis.

### *Summary*

This part has explored the role of the chief communications officer within the context of crisis management and crisis communications responsibilities. Because of the changing dynamics of information flow in the marketplace, and because of the growing incidence and substance of crisis events, most organizations would benefit from an increased understanding and participation in crisis management.

Yet this preparation should also include an examination of the overall discourse community. The public relations officer or the CCO or someone who understands communications skills and benefits should place their organization under



a microscope to try and understand where communication breaks exist. In the internal community, what are the roadblocks of information flow? Can the administrator effectively message to the lower ranks and vice versa? Are the divisions effectively communicating? Are the technical staff members able to communicate with the administrators and consultants?

What about internal-external communication? It is important that relationships be developed between the CCO and the media; between the technical staff and the regulators; between the public affairs staff and elected officials, the civic affairs community and public leaders. The overall objective of this is to create a working discourse community in which problems are identified early, and when issues do exist there are working and hopefully friendly relationships in place.

By examining the information flow and the relationships, then taking steps to insure their well being, an administrator can diminish the chance of backbreaking crises taking place, and can surely lessen the impact of a crisis should it occur. In the fast-paced media environment of today's business world, such an analysis is no longer simply an activity to be considered, it is a required management-style change. Is this solely a communication issue? The answer is guardedly, no. However; the importance of communication, relationship building, and attention to detail in developing concise workable models of the discourse community cannot be overemphasized.

CHAPTER II: CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN CONTEXT

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*Part VI: The Web in Context with Other Communication Delivery Platforms*

Heath wrote, “New communication technologies open many vistas for issues management...the Internet and the Web will help democratize issues discussions. Technologies allow for increased interactivity—public dialogue—between issue discussants” (273, 274). Hachigian and Hallahan wrote, “Growing numbers of journalists use the World Wide Web as a reporting tool. Journalists cite as among the most appealing reasons the scope and depth of information, as well as the speed at which information can be retrieved” (44). In this, Hachigian and Hallahan are suggesting that the Web offers such a distinctive and powerful platform for use that reporters are drawn to it for a variety of reasons ultimately becoming immersed in both the technology and the information base—almost as a symbiotic lure.

Unlike a newspaper or magazine that is read and discarded, the Web offers continuity, ease of use and an almost seductive means of information retrieval. While television compares more readily with the Web as an attractive visual medium, it still does not offer the flexibility of use and the extraordinary archival capacity, at least at this juncture in its technological evolution. Technology that combines different forms of media and for-profit external archives may offer the consumer many choices of present or past programming in the future, further expanding the users’ entertainment and research choices.

The Web also offers *transparency*—not a completely new concept in journalism, however; one that has almost been perfected with the Internet.

Transparency in journalism reflects the reader's ability to pursue and extract accountability of news journalism. In viewing documents on the Internet, users may follow embedded referenced links to their own personal levels of satisfaction. Writers and journalists, by using embedded links may write copy on Internet pages and provide citations for backup and substantiation. In a trade e-journal, Weinberger wrote, "The second value that's changing is transparency, i.e., letting us see through an article to its sources and to the author writing it. Already a few journalists are posting the complete interviews from which they drew a story. And it would be helpful to know more about an author so we can get a sense of who she is and how she thinks. Transparency accomplishes some of the same goals as the attempt to be objective: Objectivity tries to remove the reporter's point of view, while transparency tries to make that point of view obvious so we can compensate for it as we read the story" (1).

The purpose of this part in this chapter is to explore information delivery within the context of major media platforms—airwave technology (radio and television), the newspaper, and lastly the Internet. In reviewing the various scholarly examinations of the subject matter, I found similarity in the way pundits, scholars and practitioners offered analysis of the respective platforms. Perhaps this is important not so much in examining each of the media platforms for their placement in the workings of crisis communication; rather from the perspective of technological communication advancements as a whole. Each of the technologies initially promised widespread cultural changes and enhanced communication to a myriad of audiences. Each enjoyed status as the preeminent technology and communication

device of the day with many scholars predicting educational value, intellectual stimulation, and entertainment for generations. No one knew what the future would hold; therefore each platform represented the ultimate technology at the time. Yet one-by-one, each technology morphed, fragmented, or combined with other technology to meet consumer demands or possibly to meet some research need of the moment. The technological combinations in today's modern technological era are remarkable, such as Satellite radio systems, TiVo video archival units; PDA's offering many different technology uses and computers that provide work stations, television reception, telephone service and the use of the Internet. Yet each also offers standalone primary technology—there are still radios simply providing radio reception; there are televisions simply offering television reception.

What does this examination have to do with crisis management and crisis communication? If Heath was correct in reasoning that new technologies offer vistas for issues management, then each technology platform has a place in that discussion—from an historical perspective *and* with respect to current impact. It is almost implicit that television, radio, and the newspaper all are significant in discussion of facilitating information flow to the masses. We can directly correlate crisis impact with the growth of the newspaper, radio, and television. The same concept holds true for the Internet and I will treat this medium as a fourth information delivery platform.

It is an interesting sidebar that in my examination of literature, I saw only occasional historical evidence that any of the platforms would evolve to become the powerful force of inquiry that seems to evident today. Perhaps the first inkling of the

power of the media in reporting scandals and titillating events was in the late 1800's with the advent of some of the first newspapers. Yet, along the way there was scant indication of what would come in the future. Today, all media platforms use their microscopic scrutiny of governments, corporations, non-profits and all organizations seemingly as a foundation for their existence—perhaps even surpassing their entertainment functions. You do not buy a newspaper for the entertainment—you do so to read the headlines. This aspect of media seems to be a rather monumental force in our culture, influencing both our entertainment and our public policy.

The broader orientation of this dissertation is crisis management as a discipline, and more specifically crisis communication as an important element of management issues. Yet the role of the media in the examination of crisis is vast and inextricable. Given that much of this dissertation is devoted to crisis management as a function of communication and information delivery—primarily involving the relationship with media platforms—I do not want to overly dwell on crisis issues in this chapter. Instead, I intend this discussion primarily as an examination of the platforms themselves, the expectations and uses of the media as they have morphed through the years with only occasional references to their relationship to crisis management. I believe this is an important perspective as more detailed crisis management issues follow in later chapters.

Moreover, I have emphasized the power of the various delivery platforms as a primary force that to some extent served to energize the increased incidence and influence of crisis. Examining the history of these media platforms helps us understand how they have evolved into the information forces in the modern era.

Television: Early analysis of the television touts its arrival as a, “Modern means of communication that spans continents, bridges oceans, annihilates time and space...offering men the wisdom of the ages to free them from tyrannies and establishes co-operation among the people of the Earth. The emergence of such interdependence and the technological advancements that propelled it can be responsible for the average American’s improved standard of living, and the expansion of such networks would produce ever increasing levels of peace, prosperity and leisure in the not-so-distant future” (362). This far reaching statement was given in advance of the official roll-out of the commercial television at the 1939 World’s Fair in New York City.

Even earlier, in 1938, the noted author E.B. White commented well before television became a household word, “I believe television is going to be the test of the modern world and that in this new opportunity to see beyond the range of our vision, we shall discover either a new and unbearable disturbance of the general peace, or a saving radiance in the sky. We shall stand or fall by television—of that I can be sure” (vii).

Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after some eighty years of television history in the U.S., Kronig wrote, “Television is the preferred and most effective instrument in creating a culture based on consumption and commerce” (43). Yet he also stated, “The whole existence of television is based on ever-increasing consumption,” and he surmised that the competitive and commercial mass of television has evolved into a “dumbing down” in America. He stated that television is a pervasive cultural icon,

yet one whose sponsors demand increasing participation by users for their success, and one that has a net negative intellectual effect on society.

Are the two statements made almost a century apart conflicting? Probably not. Television has made and still has a profound impact on culture, consumption and probably even proliferation of Western values. Yet, as Kronig points out, while there is information to be gained from television, its persistent presence appears not to have promoted healthy intellectual gains in American society.

Trask wrote, “Some analysts believe that television diminishes the ability of people to read while others argue equally fervently that computers require and reward reading...Television is increasingly portrayed as the primary component of the ‘national memory’ that students and society possess...it may promote a sense of radical individualism in American society that can be both socially disruptive and personally liberating” (361). Yet, even 30 years ago, authors theorized that television as an educational platform represented a net drain on the individual and collective intellectualism of American students. Sass noted, “Television, because it is a visual rather than a verbal medium, is frequently cited as a reason for the recent drop in students’ reading skills” (103). Sass was particularly concerned with the medium’s influence because of its pervasiveness. She noted that in 1979, some 96% of Americans owned at least one television. Her work, supported by many other authors, looked at ways in which children learn as a function of hours in front of the television screen. She suggested that constant visual stimuli tended to diminish the ability to retain and comprehend information delivered through reading. She also pointed out that because of the visual entertainment stimuli offered by television,

many children consistently wished to watch the screen rather than indulge in the work of reading.

I do not want to stray too far from the point of discussion relative to television as a delivery platform. What seems relevant is that television began as a medium to change the American way of life, to bring people together toward a common cultural theme, to rapidly introduce them to commercial products and to form a close knit value system between what is seen on television and what happens in daily life—definitely a mining ground for crisis reporting. This is a rather exalted view of the publicly-stated views of those involved in rolling out the tube in the late 1930's, probably many of whom stood to financially gain from it. Yet, the debate continues on the value of television and its use as a delivery platform. Is it delivering to its potential, or has it been relegated to the comic book section of the library?

There are differences in the scholarly examination of television as to the extent of success or failure of these objectives. Few authors deny the impact of television as a delivery platform, and many agree that it is used primarily as a means of commercialism and not expansion of the knowledge base. Many also believe that television has been detrimental in that it has replaced reading as an entertainment medium.

As an educational resource, television has mixed results. There are many examples of successful use of television, especially at the K-12 level. In Georgia, the Southern Center for International Studies has been programming history and social science video training for both teachers and students for many years. Using innovative instructional formats, the SCIS video teaching tapes are as interactive as



can be had via television. Sections of information are presented and then student or teachers are invited to follow prompts for written lesson reminders. At the conclusion of a video, hard copy tests are given on the presented materials. According to SCIS, “The World in Transition Series consists of instructional guides and accompanying videotapes covering seven world regions from a geographic, economic, political, cultural and environmental standpoint. The series is supplementary to high school social studies curricula and can also be applied in middle schools” (Harrison 2004). SCIS is one of many educational vendors in the United States that have used television format for training and education. ‘Stop and test’ methods are employed for users to listen, review and be assessed on a variety of subjects. Many educational institutions and state departments of education give these types of services high markets for their interesting formats and current content.

Still, these programs are limited in the amount of interaction possible for users. Many are for-profit businesses whose products are very expensive. However; most educators use videotape instruction as a supplement for classroom experience, and possibly to update dated materials in textbooks. Rarely would such material be considered primary educational tools.

As a persuasive medium, at this stage of its development, few would dispute its use in advertising, political strategy and information delivery. Advertising agencies adopt success factors based on the number of “hits” to the public via television. With the onset of cable, niche audiences were created and any organization, business or politician can afford to advertise.

As the chief external affairs officer for an educational institution, one of my responsibilities was to purchase advertising on a limited budget. Ten years ago, the only regional television advertising was network affiliations and the costs were out of reach. We paid \$250,000 for an annual television campaign that was extremely limited in exposure.

Five years ago, as cable channels proliferated, the price for purchasing over 1,000 fifteen-second ads on 20 or more cable channels in the region was less than \$15,000, or about \$15 per ad. Granted, we might often see the ads in the middle of the night between infomercials selling Ginzu knives and breast enlargements, but still the exposure was quite amazing—and it directly connected with our market. This recent phenomenon allows exposure for almost any type of merchandise or service.

For large corporations using the major networks as an advertising medium the price can be astronomical, but the results remarkable. From the niche cable buy at a few bucks a pop to the Super Bowl at hundreds of thousands of dollars per ad, television is the medium of choice for broad and wide exposure.

There are ample opportunities for use of television as an informational platform of extraordinary worth. As a fledgling government affairs representative some twenty five years ago, one of my most fervent wishes was to have legislative bodies televise proceedings allowing public access to the work of their elected officials. I recall working with members and staff of the U.S. House administrative affairs committee in the late 1970's toward this effect. As staff attempting to “work” Congress, my colleagues and I were roundly defeated in the name of “privileged

content,” that is, Congressional officials did not want the public to know about their work and their proceedings.

After many battles of the public demanding such access, most of Congress’ legislative workings are now televised via C-span, a proprietary network financed by a consortium of cable companies. C-span is available to more than 80 million Americans and is a channel whose popularity has soared during the past decade (Kagan World Media). A more recent development is availability of committee hearings and proceedings on the floor of the both the U.S. House and Senate via Internet platforms. The importance of this is that as a public information resource, television is a prodigious medium seemingly ever increasing in impact.

As far as issues of crisis management, crisis communication and, crisis interaction are involved; the television is a very important element. The 100 or more cable channels, 24/7 news programming and network attention to local, state, national, and international events are all competing venues for information. Each competes fiercely to get the news first, to get exclusive interviews and to be more in-depth than the others. This creates a litany of broadcasts trying to one-up the next—each more sensational than the next, and one reporter after the other examining the issues for sensational news. That the television is currently the most prolific media in terms of visibility and access makes it important to crisis management in that scrutiny of journalist is unlimited and *avoidability* of the broadcasts is next to impossible.

It is probable that many of the initial objectives of the television have been met, including commercial proliferation and mass distribution of American idiomatic thoughts and beliefs. It is indeed the cultural icon of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps having

more impact on the way we think than any other form of technology. Additionally, through activism in the public sector, television has offered an accountability factor for the workings of elective and appointive bodies. As an educational medium, there are many successes and important uses of the technology. As an instructive medium, progress has been made especially bringing solutions to remote areas of the nation, and especially using satellite technology.

Television is also a dominant entertainment platform with impressive offerings in advertising and visibility. It offers a significant platform for education and information delivery, and is a primary source of data when crises occur. While some express alarm as to its effect on learning and its persuasive role in shaping American values, television is a medium here to stay and a mainstay in the lives of most Americans.

Radio: The radio medium appears to be a much overlooked commodity in the world of scholarly analysis. Unlike television, paper media and the Internet, authors often note the lack of research and examination in the medium of radio. Perhaps such scholarly examination simply missed the heyday of radio.

With its debut in the early 1900's and the first official radio transmission around 1915, America grew up listening to the radio. Like television, radio was a cultural icon dedicated to information dispersal and entertainment. Also like television, radio has hung on largely as a commercially driven entertainment medium, sometimes relegated to providing companionship on daily commutes from suburbia.

Sloan and Parcell wrote, "By the 1920's, radio began taking its place in the world of media. It had the effect of bringing together people via the airwaves, of

somehow reflecting the truth and then beckoning listeners to conform to it” (10). Such was the radio culture of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Several milestones have helped to define radio and perhaps set the stage for its current status in the world of media delivery. Early internal skirmishes within the industry brought much debate to the public forum, including the, “Tortuous path to the first radio broadcast law and the establishment of the Federal Radio Commission in the 1920’s. Rowland reported that the law was important, “Due to the increasing cacophony of signal interference, the inability of the industry to police itself and the legal failure of the previous radio laws” (368). In essence, because of the lack of policing, countless stations’ signals were overlapping and interfering with each other. As a result, the quality was often very poor. As the Federal acts began to take hold and transmission quality improved, in 1939, more 80% of American homes had AM radio sets. In the next twenty years, very little changed about radio except for greatly expanded program expansion. Yet during this time, technological research would shape radio’s look and feel for decades to come.

FM radio was rolled out to the public in the 1960’s offering a higher quality sound. Later in the decade, FM added new technology of stereo broadcasting that allowed listeners to blend multiple “layers” of sound through two or more speakers enabling a richer and more intricate sound character. Music producers quickly modified their production equipment to accommodate the new stereo broadcasts, thus enhancing the listening experience to listeners.

The advent of the transistor was also a major milestone for radio. In the early days, radios had large and cumbersome tubes and diodes placed in boxes of varying

sizes. The transistor offered two enhancements; first, a lesser power level for use and second a much smaller casing. FM/AM transistor radios offered users improved sound quality and cases that could be easily transported. When FM stereos, using transistors, could be placed inside automobiles, the radio grew into a medium for information and entertainment possessed by most Americans from the late 1960's until the present.

Later enhancements involved coupling of other technologies, such as the AM/FM radio with cassette decks in the 1980's; and then with compact disc players in the 1990's. These technology collaborations insured that radio would continue to be a medium that Americans would bring along with them when they left their homes or offices.

By 2000, radio became a medium used almost exclusively by people on the go. Most sound entertainment systems in the homes were compact discs or other technology that employed digital information compaction. In effect, radio use was split by new technology, once again fragmenting audiences to AM talk shows, FM music shows, compact disc players, MP3 players and the newest technology, satellite radio. Cole opined, "As TV has fragmented over the last two decades, most of us have adjusted our media planning and buying accordingly. Through all of this radio was a 'Rock of Gibraltar.' Certainly popular formats shifted and evolved; FM dwarfed AM but AM came off the ropes and found a place as the home of talk radio" (18). Cole noted that because of the splintering of the audiences, moving largely on technological innovations, "Listening levels, however; were predictable, and local-oriented copy, weather and sports tie-ins were the norm. It seemed to be a safe haven

as TV fragmented and reinvented itself every few years.” In effect, audiences found their niche radio broadcasting levels.

Coles also noted that the newest technology will further fragment traditional radio audiences, “My opinion is that such stability is about to disappear as I believe Satellite *radio* will be one more tightening of the noose around the necks of those who think only in terms of conventional media options” (19). He predicts that satellite radio will rival television exposure in the coming years, offering users the highest quality sound, flexible commercial free programming, and completely portable casing. In effect, listeners can become music aficionados and genre purists for about ten bucks a month.

Are we relegating the radio ultimately to talk show status? Perhaps even that medium is challenged. Cole also noted, “Recently Bob Edwards, longtime host of National Public *Radio's* Morning Edition was demoted to roving reporter. After a tour to launch his new book, Edwards jumped to his own show on satellite *radio*” (20). It is not uncommon for talk show hosts to routinely record their shows for play on niche commercial free radio stations that may be purchased over the Internet or on satellite radio channels. Radios may exist in the future, however; there is no question that the format for listening is radically changing.

Like television, radio is a significant factor in consideration of the topics of crisis management. Being the most portable of any of the media platforms, radio is usually the first source of news for many users. Yet it is also one of the most difficult of the media platforms for organizations to work with. There are few reporters for radio, and much of their content is generated from other media sources. Therefore,

radio news material emanates primarily through ancillary relationships and news is disseminated with little content management.

This aspect of radio presents a dilemma to organizational crisis management in that there is an almost negligible ability to influence the news events that are broadcast. Thus, America's most portable media platform is almost untouchable from the perspective of organizational objectives in crisis management.

Like television, radio was not only a cultural icon; it also was a primary source of information and news from around the globe. Perhaps it has diminished in its value as a reason for the family to gather. However; it remains a popular delivery platform for music, entertainment and information. Its technology has evolved in a number of ways to allow higher quality sound, portability and connection to all points of the world. Yet still, it is a linear technology allowing no interface except for user selection.

Radio as an information source seems to be lessening in impact, except for news, weather and talk shows on the morning commute. It is a cultural icon that will be remembered nostalgically when America was moving into the technological age, and it is unlikely this type of setting will ever return.

Yet it remains the medium currently most often available when portability is required. While laptops, portable televisions, PDA's and paper media are important elements of information delivery, when people are traveling, radio is certainly vital to that segment of the population. Moreover, as digital technology evolves in collaboration with radio technology, it is likely radio will increase its use in the daily lives of Americans.



Newspaper: According to Clark, “The first English language newspaper probably was printed in Oxford England for export to Amsterdam in about 1620” (6). It was basically a compendium of policy, religion, politics and stories of royal comings and goings. It was not a document for the purpose of commercial gain, rather an experiment in moving information from the government and monarch to the people using the technology of the printing press.

In fact, many believed that the newspaper was the first venture in Europe into enlightening the masses. With the printing press less than 200 years old at the time, intellectual illumination had been solely within the domain of the church and courts. The coming on of the newspaper provided information for the first time to the common person.

The first newspaper in America was published in 1690 and lasted for exactly one issue. While it was a very limited experiment essentially doomed even before it was published, a journalistic concept in America was born. The newspaper was called the *Publick Occurrence: Both Foreign and Domestic* bent toward tabloidism, or publishing events and activities close to home that hopefully would either stir people to action or make them raise an eyebrow. The publisher was Benjamin Harris, who, like many Americans were tired of reading newspapers imported from England (whose primary topic was government propaganda). He believed that news of interest was predominantly local in nature. Thus, in Harris’ first edition, he wrote an article about a sex scandal in the French royal family (4-6). In 2005, such an article would probably be considered mild and of trivial prurient interest entirely acceptable to the more sophisticated journalistic marketplace. In Puritan

Massachusetts in 1690, the copy became scandal, and the *Publick Occurrence* would be published no more by order of the throne.

However short-lived this newspaper event was, it helped establish some important foundations for the next two hundred years of newspaper journalism. First, that readers were as (or more) interested in what was happening in their immediate surroundings than they were in the broader issues of the day. British newspapers talked about government events, religious issues and the British royalty. Harris believed that there could be more to journalism than public *affairs* (no pun intended). The second principle was that reporting about scandal, whether true or not, raised public interest and hooked readers to a story (and increased circulation).

By the early 1720's, newspapers began to be more commonplace in America. These were the forerunners of 18<sup>th</sup> century American newspapers, and were "vehicles of propaganda, literature and commercial advertising as well" (Harris 23). The first official daily newspaper in America was in 1722 in Boston, called the "Boston News-Letter."

In 1833, Benjamin Day founded *The Sun*, in Baltimore with the idea of a "Penny Press." The newspaper cost one cent. Day's vision was that by making the price affordable, he could only make a living by selling large volumes of papers—thus he would have to capture the public's interest in a large way. Again, as with the *Publick Occurrence*, Day accomplished his goal by selling scandal, especially in the lives and careers of public figures. Shortly after founding the newspaper, he hired a reporter who had specialized in court reporting, that is keeping track of the routine activities of the legal machinations in Baltimore. While the paper reported local and

international events, the twist Day brought to the issue was in reporting and writing copy about famous people involved in legal frays. One entry involved Councilman John Dolly, who “was so very drunk last night he imagined himself to be on his own native Lun’on.”

Day’s paper was so successful using this tactic, other papers in the city began mimicking *The Sun*, and the practice became acceptable journalism in many publications. Thus, a third foundation became part of the journalism media platform—that newspapers could provide accountability of the common person, but more importantly public officials. Moreover, Day found that by slanting the truth a bit, he would sell more newspapers. Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, courts would allow such scrutiny in the name of the free press, and in particular would give the press a good deal of leeway in talking about public officials.

Still another milestone in journalism came in the late 1800’s as Randolph Hearst became a publishing magnate. Did the press report the events or did they help to make the event? Hearst, “Took credit for the Spanish American War in 1898, repeatedly calling it ‘the Journal’s War’” (Sloan & Purcell 9). In an attempt to boost circulation with his paper *The New York Journal*, Hearst sent a news team to Cuba to report on the insurrection there. His reporter actually helped formulate a battle plan, leading an attack on a Spanish fort. All reported firsthand in his newspaper, Hearst presumably crossed a line in which journalism would move from spectator to participant, an activity that would be recreated many times in the future.

These early trends became fundamental methodology in newspaper journalism that has remained in place through the 20<sup>th</sup> century and to the present. Newspapers

offer perhaps the most prolific platform for delivery of information to the American public, surpassing radio and rivaling television. While most would argue that television is the more entertaining of the two mediums, newspapers are more accessible for quick information to more sectors of the public. Newspapers are also arguably the first non-linear information platform. Readers can sift through the papers to achieve whatever results they want and hang onto it for later use. Not so with television and radio. With these media, one stares or listens to the box, changing channels on a whim to watch or listen to something else. Thus, the newspaper has at least one thing in common with the Internet—it is not an entirely linear medium in the sense that radio and television is.

According to O'Reilly, newspapers have “Invested millions in new, state-of-the-art colour production facilities...become leaders in merchandising...invested millions behind our brands; we've aggressively targeted consumers — both young and old; we present a medium that is relatively fragmentation-proof; and the Internet — supposedly the nemesis of our industry — has in fact become a critical and vibrant part of our product and brand mix” (14). Clearly, the newspaper industry is fighting the competition, including the Internet delivery platform in every possible way.

Continuing this thought, in the last two years or so, as stated by O'Reilly, newspapers have made their way into the Internet business. Most newspaper publishing companies now have .com or .net addresses for use by Web surfers. Not only are newspaper columns available on the net, many of the larger publishing companies having archival capabilities for research purposes. While Internet use is a bit cumbersome in having to sign in and then locate the story, the use further defines

itself as a non-linear medium splintering into new markets through the use of technology.

It seems an interesting and perhaps a significant side note that the number of daily newspapers is declining. There has been much media attention to this in the past few months, with debate over the reasons for the decline. Pilgrim described this phenomenon as a natural occurrence of monopolies. “As applied to the newspaper industry, the argument says dailies move inexorably toward natural monopoly status. According to the 1970 Canadian Special Senate Committee on the Mass Media, natural monopoly means a larger newspaper can produce papers at a lower cost per issue. Such economies of scale are passed on to advertisers, who flock to the larger-circulating paper in order to send their advertising messages to a greater number of readers more inexpensively. Over time, the leading daily grows larger, while competition withers” (Pilgrim 3).

This is not to say that finding a newspaper is difficult, or in the vernacular of this dissertation, that is an unavailable medium. Pilgrim’s inference was that if the theory of diminishing newspapers as a result of monopoly is accurate, it seems relevant that the public may not be getting a diversity of opinion. Many larger cities have had two or more major newspapers, in some cases with the same ownership, but with differing political philosophies simply to offer contrasting opinions. Some might say this was a ploy to encourage a stronger circulation and to cover the bases of political opinion. However; when competition devours competition, there is less opinion in the court of public opinion, thus quelling the degree of discourse that might have been.

It is also noteworthy that of the three media television, radio and newspapers, the newspaper has been affixed with a political label far more than the first two. Occasionally, television anchors or reporters are chided by other media as having a certain political bias. And during the past few years, radio has also gained that reputation, with the advent of (mostly) right wing talk show hosts.

However; individual newspapers are often accused of having an identifiable political bias, often reflecting ownership. It is a tag that indeed sells advertising and increases circulation, however; by and large decreases credibility as time passes. Patterson and Donsbach noted that in the early days of newspaper journalism, the press and the political parties were inextricably linked. When customers purchased the daily rag, he knew exactly what he was buying, and the opinion to be expressed.

The specter of political inference remains in most newspapers. While I will not in the context of this dissertation attempt to tag the big city newspapers for political ties, it would not be difficult if I were determined to do it. Journalism now *claims* to be unbiased. And for every “liberal” editor on the op ed page, there is probably also a “conservative” editor. Patterson and Donsbach stated, “It would be a mistake, however;; to dismiss political advocacy as an insignificant component of modern journalism. Vestiges of old-time partisan press remain” (455).

As for issues involving crisis, the newspaper medium perhaps is the most prolific of all the media. Owing to its penchant for political bias and its rich history in scandalous tabloidism, newspaper journalists undoubtedly enjoy a greater reputation for involvement in crisis issues than other media representatives. From the outrageous paparazzi in British tabloids to extreme muckraking tactics of American

reporters, newspapers are filled with copy created by writers with sensationalist journalism on their minds. In my experience, newspaper reporters are definitely the most prolific of the journalists, and the first to contact you, probably when you wish they would not do so.

As Trask and Sapp noted, reading newspapers encourages reflection and thought. Other scholars suggested that the audio and video platforms do not encourage intellectual enhancement. Television and radio helped define a culture through the stories told and the scenes viewed. Newspapers helped form opinion.

Newspapers are a non-linear media and an unfaltering bearer of information. Politicians use television and radio to advertise horizontally—to let the audience see their faces and hear their voices. Politicians use newspapers to tell their story, with reporters as unwitting collaborators. If radio was born and grew as a medium that gathered the family, and television molded the American cultural scene through products and commercialism, then newspapers have reflected our society through columns and editorials.

Therefore, in assessing our assigned values of the newspaper as a delivery platform, we can construe it to have portability; it has entertainment value, educational value, and has had a considerable impact on society since its inception in the 1700's. Yet we can also point to potential strong competition with the strengths of the Internet. As students of today with their command of the virtual world become adults, is it reasonable to assume that they will take with them a greater affinity for the Web than for traditional newspaper journalism?

As a medium for crisis journalism, the newspaper currently wins any comparison. Journalists often begin their careers as reporters for newspapers making a paltry salary, yet being pressed for more and more copy to fill their columns. A publisher of a major regional newspaper once confided in me that his newspaper had initiated more careers than all of the local newspapers combined, a bold statement indeed. The young journalists would start out working there for a small salary and then graduate to other, more prestigious jobs in the same newspaper or others based on the copy they wrote. Cullen, in describing life as a journalist, asked the question of a politician, “Can’t I be as honest and as honorable as you?” The response was, “Touché” (95). Enough said.

Internet: Port described the origination of the Internet,

“A half-dozen individuals have been hailed as father of the Internet. Scores of others also had a hand in birthing this network. But the person who sifted through the contending technologies and drew up the blueprint for a networking infrastructure—then actually made it work—was Lawrence G. Roberts. Roberts' baby was ARPAnet, the Internet's predecessor. But he never laid claim to the original idea. The Net's inspirational father was J.C.R. Licklider (1915-1990), a psychologist at MIT who outlined his dream of a Galactic Network in the early 1960s. Then, during a stint at the Pentagon's Advanced Research Projects Agency, or ARPA (now DARPA), "Lick" pretty much described today's Net. At a



fateful meeting with Lick in 1964, Roberts became a disciple. Still, when ARPA attempted to recruit him to oversee the network project, Roberts held back, worried that the administrative duties would be boring. Finally, in December, 1966, at age 29, he acquiesced. The next year, Roberts outlined his networking scheme at conferences and meetings with researchers. Scientists often resisted his call to share their computers, which were rare and expensive resources back then. But ARPA held the purse strings for much of their funding, so Roberts was hard to resist” (20-22).

J.R. Licklider’s choice of words in describing the Internet as a “Galactic Network,” was remarkably visionary in the early 1960’s. That the entire intellectual assets of the human race might be available and accessible to earth’s inhabitants at the time was beyond the imagination of most people. However;; in a time when computers were the size of rooms and now-antiquated programs were run using punch cards, looking far enough in the future to envision a vast knowledge source without political, physical, or cultural boundaries was quite astonishing. Yet, those early predictions are well on their way to fruition. Today’s college students have grown up with the Internet, and in their academic examinations have never been without the resources offered by computers.

Each progression of the platform seems to offer choices more creative and more profound than those of previous generations. Google’s recent move to place

millions of volumes of books available free on the Web through a consortium of prestigious universities was a decision that continues the process of Licklider's Galactia (Staff Editorial 8). The delivery platform will not become just a little larger, it will become exponentially larger. If other organizations, corporations, or institutions of higher education see success in Google's foray into the digitalization of literature, which is likely inevitable, most published documents will be on the Web and available to the Internet in less than a generation.

The Web is a cultural platform. A review of scholarly journal articles in one narrow genre of writing called "The Internet and Culture" reveals discussion and relationship between the Internet and innumerable ethnic, religious, cultural, and demographic groups in the world. All sectors may express their opinions, display their writings, view literature, sound, photographs, and video on *virtually* any topic. Clearly, the Web is the place where people can celebrate their particular niche no matter how small or large.

A haunting question for the future will be the extent to which various levels of government both domestically and internationally will allow non-censored material from those whose opinions or affiliations run counter to the best interests of those governments. Screaming fire in a crowded coliseum is not a first amendment right. Does the same thought follow with a hate group calling for the murder of whatever enemy de jour that haunts them? How does the Galactic network govern this? Who is in charge of world Internet first amendment rights?

For crisis management, access to this vast intellectual system reflects a complex and extraordinary arrangement of information available to virtually any

public. As Grunig and others have reasoned, such access presents opportunities for organizations in many areas of environmental scanning and research, but it also presents many challenges. Individuals and groups who wish to cause an organization harm may do so more easily in the future because they will be armed with information obtained from the Internet.

Web technology allows coupling with other forms of media. Web television, Web radio, Internet newspapers, handheld computer devices with integration to the Web, Web telephonic devices, and more are part of the Web's playing field. The Web often makes ancillary devices more accessible, less expensive, and more effective. There is no end in sight. The platform not only is vertical, it is horizontal, and rapidly expanding its horizontal plane.

It is a platform of enormous depth and breadth. In the area of intellectual development, the Web is a resource with decreasing competition and no political or geophysical boundaries. Scholarly journals are available at a moment's notice, book citations and reviews seem unlimited, and if a published document of any kind is not available now, it soon will be. Given the choice of sitting in a library sifting through hundreds of journals and books or sitting at a desk in your home or office using sort commands in massive databases for quick information fixes is really not that much of a choice. It is reasonable to assume that in the years to come all published literature in human history will be accessible through the Web. An interesting budget issue might be the degree to which government funds will be allotted for digital databases with scholarly journals and other academic periodicals to be made available for public use. I can state from experience that such academic pursuits remain distant from the

political process, and it will be up to representatives of universities and schools to secure the necessary funds for expansion. To keep up, library officials from universities will have to become more involved to insure the integration of such databases into budgetary discussions.

Weblogs represent a use of the Web whose evolution is far from complete. The future of blogs is uncertain, however; blogging appears to be moving in the direction of being a substantial media force in its own right. At first, Weblogs were little more than Web sites where the site designer collected links to other sites. These sites were often a great help to a Web surfer who might want to save a greyhound or maybe find out all the latest news about *Fear Factor*.

The number of these early sites was limited, however; since in order to create a Weblog, one needed to be able to write computer code in HTML. This changed in 1999, with the introduction of *Blogger*—online software that allowed anyone to create a Weblog without any need to know HTML code. Hundreds of blogs suddenly became hundreds of thousands. Newspaper publishers now wonder if blogging will consume their business, and much study is now taking place scrutinizing the integration of the two media.

In relation to crisis management, the rise of blogs is significant in the public domain, however; it clearly has not reached its potential. “Blogs are proliferating as fast as a computer virus. According to a report this year by public relations firm Edelman and Intelliseek, a provider of business-intelligence solutions, about 20,000 new blogs are created daily, and an estimated 10 million U.S. blogs will exist by the end of 2005. Together, these blogs link up to create what is known as a Blogosphere,

a collective Internet conversation that is one of the fastest-growing areas of new content on the Web” (Armour Money 01b).

What is apparent is that some of the most in-depth commentary on public affairs occurs on blogs. These are unfiltered observations on a multitude of subjects, once considered off-the-wall fringe discussions, but now involved in mainstream commentary of almost unlimited proportion. Currently, if there is a crisis event that reaches the public’s ear, it is reasonable to assume that blogging will be a part of the reporting media. It may also be assumed that if an organization is large enough, *Intranet* blogging from employee stakeholders will participate in the discussion. This has implications for crisis management policy in determining what role if any the crisis management team should play in internal blogging. Should Intranet blogging be censored or forbidden? Should management have its own Intranet blogs that pass information to selected stakeholders? These are questions that crisis management teams will have to address since the advent of blogging.

As for crisis communication, blogs seem to be gaining in strength as a medium for assuaging public demand for information, and indeed for greater access to organizations during crisis events. O’Grady examined blogs for their involvement during large scale crises and found them to be increasingly popular in a number of areas.

“**Blogs** first gained a foothold as sources of news in the weeks following 9/11, and continued to gain prominence during the war in Iraq (through the work of bloggers such as Salam Pax) and the US elections in 2004. The phenomenon has been called "citizen

journalism" - the creation of a news stream by a large number of everyday Internet users working independently. Now, as the effects of the disaster have unfolded, **blogs** have repeatedly beaten other media to the punch, providing the instant information that anxious relatives and rescue teams need. **Blogs** have several advantages over old media: location, speed, freedom - both from bureaucracy and fixed print times. What the international networks present as "breaking news" has often been distributed in blog form hours earlier. There are downsides, too: for independence and variety, read lack of quality control and, at times, inaccuracy; and **blogs** still cannot rival old media for in-depth analysis of events and their consequences. But for swift and vivid information, they are hard to beat" (O'Grady 14, 15).

As an organizational communication tool, blogs, the Internet, and the Intranet potentially offer greater coverage than the newspaper, radio, television, or other media. You might be able to obtain a copy of the *Miami Herald* in Beijing, however; it probably would not be current.

The Web is interactive; therefore, questions may be asked and answers provided instantaneously with data formulated using a variety of programs. Because media, marketing, advertising, Intra- and, Internet communication over the Web have greatly expanded the opportunity for discourse, it stands to reason that organizational dynamics will be influenced.

Undoubtedly, the Web is an untapped source of crisis management. The Web as a delivery platform is substantially transforming the way we live and is becoming as fundamental to almost every part of our life as television, radio, and newspapers. Many Americans depend on it for business, recreation, entertainment, communication, and information. These numbers are rapidly increasing. With the first comprehensive, accessible, and affordable information resource medium, organizations must factor the Web into their communications strategies not only for visibility and sales but also as a tactic for management, including crisis management.

In a recent study by the Pew Foundation, researchers concluded that the Web would continue to transform the life of Americans far beyond changes thus far. A majority of researchers in the study believe, “As telecommuting and home-schooling expand, the boundary between work and leisure will diminish and family dynamics will change because of that” (Pew Foundation ii). The study also found that significant changes will be made in the world of news and publishing and, in short, the Web will dramatically change much of the way we live, educate ourselves, and conduct commerce in the future.

### *Part VI Summary*

From using the simple tools of the caveman to the exploration of the stars, innovation is inevitable in every generation, with changes varying from baby steps to quantum leaps. Each change affects the way we interact with others, the efficiency of our communications, and the productivity of our organizations.

Radio, television, newspapers, and the Web are tools for communication. As each came into being, broad predications claimed that the technology would produce broad transformations of society and human existence. In many ways, the predictions came true for each of the technologies. Few examples of technology in human existence have influenced the way we live more than these information platforms.

It is interesting to note that the opening paragraph of the Pew Foundation report on imagining the future of the Internet, began with the words, “Previous world altering communications technologies including the printing press, radio, and television caused commentators, researchers, entrepreneurs, and politicians of those times to predict what might come to pass due to changes wrought by such new devices. Their aim in making predictive statements was to prepare their world—to brace it for inevitable economic, political, and social adjustments. De Sola Pool stated, “These technologies caused revised conceptions of man’s place in the universe” (Pew Foundation x). While the Pew Foundation’s predictions for the Internet are even more far reaching, each of the earlier technologies in its day was equally spectacular. In this regard, the initiation of the technologies was very similar.

Suffice it to say that each of the technologies offered much opportunity for intellectual expansion. The distinction in the Web as a delivery platform is that perhaps for the first time the user can call the shots. Unlike the other types of media with limited selection of materials and horizontal platforms, the Web is multidimensional, allowing the user to search, consolidate, and utilize information according to his needs. Assuredly, the Web provides an opportunity to manage an organization more effectively, efficiently, and less expensively than in the past.



With virtually unlimited data at their fingertips, users may explore, learn, and produce in many ways. There is a place on the Web for exploration, entertainment, education, business, or sheer pleasure. Investigation via the Web can be vertical, horizontal, linear, or multi-dimensional. It can be used singularly or interactively. It can be used one-on-one or with a crowd in real time. The facets of use and exploration are endless. With the advent of blogging, any faction or slice of the public can provide in-depth comment on virtually any aspect of culture, business, sports, or other part of society. Blogging alone as a feature of the Internet offers much opportunity, but also much challenge for crisis management planners.

There will be no reckoning day for any of these platforms and no reckoning day of survival or termination. If radio ceases to exist as a traveling box, the concept of broadcasted audio will still be with us in the future. If television ceases to exist as a series of channels in our living room, the concept of video productions distributed in some manner will continue in some venue. Newspapers will continue as a commercialized communication product, however; they will continue to splinter, using other technologies to maintain some market share. The Web and Internet, the newest of the technologies, will continue their rapid expansion into the future. Indeed, none of the platforms will cease to exist; each will morph in ways difficult to fathom.

With the arrival of the Web, we probably find ourselves for the first time on the brink of having a tool that will bring about some type of world society. Accessing a government Website in France, Russia, or China is just as easy and quick as accessing your neighbor's blog site. While computers still do not exist in some

sectors of the globe, these areas are rapidly diminishing. With the arrival of computers, the user has instant access to the intellectual assets of the ages. And with this comes knowledge, skill, and education. That represents a formidable opportunity.

Concerning the subject of crisis management, I return to the initial discussion by Heath—that new communication technologies democratize issues for public debate. Organizations must go about their business with the understanding that most of their business activities, indeed most of their decisionmaking, will be accessible to the public through any one or all of the media discussed in this chapter.

Access to an organization via any one of the information platforms discussed in this chapter requires the organization to spend time, money, and staff resources to facilitate the information flow and to respond to inquiries, thus necessitating a reallocation of resources away from the primary objectives or mission of the organization. In the past, an organization could conduct its business away from the eye of the public. Executives must now factor information access into its overall management strategy.

## CHAPTER II: CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN CONTEXT

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### *Part VII: Examination of Organizational Online Communication*

#### *Introduction*

In this part I want to examine online communication in the context of the two areas of organizational management: 1) public affairs, comprised of marketing/sales, media, advertising, and public relations; and, 2) internal management, including human resources and internal communication. In each of these areas, the Internet and the Intranet are growing in strength and practice by organizations of all types. Part of my discussion will be the degree to which many organizations are currently utilizing the Internet for various elements of their operations and a brief outline of specific examples of use. I also want to show that as the Internet evolves as a management tool, there are opportunities for its use in communication strategies as well as implications for this new growth only recently being recognized.

The growth of the Internet represents a fascinating element in the discussion of crisis communication and crisis management. On the one hand, I will show that statistically the Internet has become one of the most prolific devices for organization-consumer interaction of our day. It is pervasive in its availability, its content and in its affect on our businesses, and in our daily lives. Its potential for worldwide commerce is remarkable.

Given this reality, it is also true that use of the Internet as a tool has many purposes, including being an extraordinary tool for communication. It is within this context that a paradox exists. We have perhaps the most productive messaging

platform in history, and there is evident a recognized disconnect by most communications scholars in its use for that purpose. Thus, it is important to examine the size and scope of use of the Internet, and also to discuss the paradox wherein many communication elements remain un-utilized.

### *Marketing, Public Relations, and Media*

Web marketing and sales are an escalating part of commerce in both small and large businesses, non-profits and educational institutions. While some .com businesses rely exclusively on the Web for sales, increasingly customers of more traditional retailers are turning to the Web for their purchases. There are few areas of the economy not examining the Web's potential as a sales platform. Ranchhod concluded, "Conventional channels of marketing are gradually being dissolved or assimilated into a global network fuelled by the Internet. This active medium demands "active" instead of "passive" marketing strategies. Marketing strategy and formulation of this strategy are important aspects of a company's long-term plans" (262).

In view of rapidly expanding Internet retailing, some might consider it to be a given that the Web is the place to sell in the future and that success will follow entrance into online markets. However; researchers have concluded that at least in the foreseeable future, online sellers must approach their markets with the same dedication and diligence as more traditional retailers. Ozer concluded that as a result of the advent of the Internet, "The information processing view of the firm suggests that, in rapidly changing environments, firms will need more rather than less market

information (Galbraith, 1974). Furthermore, numerous studies have also argued that those firms' abilities to collect from the environment information that their competitors' overlook can be fundamentally important for them to enhance the success of their business. Online businesses should also benefit from business intelligence so as to enhance their performance. In fact, successful online firms gather market information to design their online offerings" (Ozer 137).

According to Romani, "Predictions that the *Internet* will cause the imminent demise of personal selling litter the landscape in management literature. None of those we have seen has a solid theoretical or conceptual foundation" (1). As in other areas of Internet evolution, change is not coming easily to corporate America. The Web sales platform, however; is increasing as a vital component of American business and the economy.

From a marketing and advertising perspective, the Web platform offers opportunity for all types of organizations. Costly purchases in the media still are the mainstay in reaching much of the public sectors, however; the Web is gaining ground, especially in niche markets. Unlike traditional outlets for advertising, there is more profit potential in Internet marketing, and there is no end to new innovative strategies for online advertising. Maddox reported that the Internet currently has about 7.6% of the total investment in advertising, or about \$2 billion annually, including ad space purchased in e-newsletters, digital magazines, and online advertising. This number is projected to increase 25% from 2004 to 2005. Some researchers have shown that companies can increase their market ten-fold in a single year through Internet advertising (Maddox 17).

The increase of online advertising is not lost on more traditional marketing venues, such as the newspaper industry. The sale of About.com to the New York Times and AskJeeves.com to another media mogul signals a shifting marketplace that recognizes the importance of the Web as a sales medium. These two Websites provide information to the consumer on many topics and at the same time offer Websites selling products to deal with those topics. It is an interactive marketing strategy unavailable using traditional platforms.

Yet another area of Internet usage in marketing and promotion involves broadcast e-mails. Non-profits have gained considerable expertise through the use of targeted email advertising using this type of information delivery. Purchase of e-mail addresses offer extraordinary opportunity for non-profits. Locating those users via the Web with the propensity for philanthropy, non-profits can use niche marketing to be extremely concise and successful, with minimal expenses. Hopkins noted, "Non-profits have been slow to adopt more robust Websites and other tech tools that could speed fundraising because they fear spending precious dollars on tech that won't deliver promised benefits... [however], online donations to the USA's biggest charities surged 63% last year from 2003, a new study says, as the tsunami relief effort and Howard Dean's presidential campaign underscored the value of Internet fundraising...The groups raised a combined \$166.2 million online, the trade journal [Chronicle of Philanthropy] said" (Money 07b).

The Internet is expanding the public affairs functions of many businesses, especially in the areas of marketing, advertising, and community affairs. Grunig and Grunig, speaking specifically about Internet marketing wrote, "Public relations makes

an organization more effective when it identifies strategic constituencies in the environment and then develops communication programmes to build long term productive trusting relationships with them” (141). Grunig and Grunig also noted, quoting Tedlow, “Public relations has two promised benefits to business: increased sales and protection from unpopularity which could lead to detrimental governmental or regulatory agency activity....it is not a sales device, but as a method for protection against the political consequences of a hostile public opinion that corporate public relations has been most influential...[public relations] grew into a tool for dealing with many publics, including residents of communities, employers, suppliers, dealers, and politicians as well as customers” (142).

The Web is an excellent and relatively inexpensive forum for building and maintaining public relations from an organizational perspective. Gregory found, “The advent of the Internet and electronic communication has transformed public relations, just as it has transformed many areas of organisational and business life” (245). Gregory noted that there are significant opportunities for, “Enhanced, two-way communication between an organization and its publics, and that “organisations and businesses continue to adapt their practice to capitalize on the perceived benefits of competitive advantage and cost-saving” (247, 248). Kent, Taylor, & White examined the use of the Web platform in organizational public relations as a function of relationships with distinctive types of stakeholders. Their work looked at how an organization relates to the community through a Website. “For stakeholders, Web sites provide publics with a channel through which organizations can be viewed and better understood. The body of scholarship dedicated to studying the Internet and the

World Wide Web continues to grow. Recent theorizing suggests that the World Wide Web may facilitate more balanced organization–public relationships and increased participation of citizens in community life” (249).

For non-profits, the Web platform offers extraordinary opportunities in public relations. Kang and Norton wrote, “The public relations struggle is reaching potential publics with generally limited financial means. The World Wide Web (the Web) offers these [non-profits] organizations the unique opportunity to interactively reach multiple publics without enormous financial burdens. In their efforts, NPO [non-profit organizations] Web sites can functionally utilize the principles behind successful commercial Web sites, such as simplicity and public outreach. The Web brings the organization members to a relational space together and can be a relevant channel for NPOs to communicate their messages and erect public support for confronting issues” (279, 280).

The Internet is now a primary means of conducting business by public relations firms and PR divisions within organizations. Bovet wrote, quoting LaSalle, “Based on average growth over the past four years, Internet hosts are expected to hit 100 million by the first quarter of 1999. The commercial domain of the Internet grew 36% in the last quarter of 1994. There are now about four million commercial hosts. More than 40 million people have direct access to the Internet or are connected to other networks that link up with the Internet. Other networks include private bulletin board systems (BBS) and government networks. Internet use is currently growing at a rate of 10% to 15% per month” (33).



Yet van der Merwe, Pitt, and Abratt, agreeing with Grunig, Coombs and other scholars, reasoned that the growth and use of the Web offers both an opportunity and a challenge. They concluded that while the enhanced two-way avenue of communication between a Website and an organization's many publics is an opportunity, at the same time, giving the community a chance for virtually unlimited access for communication might present some challenges. The authors noted that many of the voices from the community represented increased workloads for PR executives, and that these external voices were often uninformed and with agendas on their mind other than the well-being of the organization. Van der Merwe, Pitt, & Abratt wrote, "Stakeholders can now communicate with each other about an organization in a very public way. The public relations function will in most cases be the department dealing with these unplanned messages. As stakeholder strength increases, PR practitioners will have to develop strategies that deal with the rising power of different stakeholders on the Web" (39). The inference is that activist groups are inherently harmful to organizations because they force them to expend resources responding to the interest of a minority of citizens.

This research clearly defines one of the most important aspects of crisis management as being that increased communicative abilities offers both opportunity and challenge. Kent & Taylor reason that the ability of an organization to reach out to stakeholders using the Web is an important facet of the modern technological workplace. Yet van der Merwe, Pitt & Abratt, Grunig, and other scholars have accurately described the dynamics of organizational public relations concerning various constituencies. The vocal minority is often the driving force behind many

changes. Their conclusions also noted, “Truly incensed stakeholders have a way of making not just the company aware of their problems, but the whole world” (46). With this as a fundamental underpinning of today’s public relations environment, there is an inherent necessity in understanding the nature of each of the advocacy, or activist groups involved in the discussion.

One suggestion overlooked by these authors in this research is the use of a Website as a platform for information delivery, rather than through traditional public relations tactics using the Web. While interactive tools with the media, stakeholders, and advocacy groups are an important facet of public relations, a salient function of the Web can be a directed and narrowly focused Website dedicated to the discussion of narrowly focused issues.

According to White and Raman, “The World Wide Web can be considered the first public relations mass medium in that it allows managed communication to flow directly between organizations and mass audiences without the gatekeeping function of other mass media; content is not filtered by journalists and editors. The Web in this sense is the first controlled mass medium. Wilcox and Nolte define a controlled medium as one in which the sender of the message has control over the content that reaches the receiver. Traditionally...controlled messages are sent through newsletters, annual reports, and other vehicles written by communication professionals in an organization. Before the advent of the World Wide Web, advertising was the only means to send a controlled message to a mass audience through a mass medium...It is a unique medium that affords new opportunities for organizations to reach and interact with stakeholders” (405).

The Web as a primary means of public relations is a relatively new concept. Clearly, use the Web as a delivery platform for messaging between an organization and its many publics offers great opportunity as noted by Kent & Taylor, who consider the practice as “building dialogic relationships” (1). They reason that by actively communicating with stakeholders via the Web, information of value to an organization can be routinely transferred with a minimum of cost. The benefit is that over time, a relationship with the stakeholder can be built.

The ability of the Web to facilitate this information transfer is superior to other forms of media in that there is connectivity. Information is sent, and a response is possible—instantaneously. Unlike a newspaper, the radio or television, there does not have to be a press or print deadline. Electronic media is available for immediate transfer once the copy is written.

One key for success is in understanding and segmenting the various constituencies to insure effective (and targeted) communication. Another key for success is insuring the vocal minority that van der Merwe, Pitt & Abratt, and Grunig discussed do not overwhelm the system. Having dedicated antagonists swamping phone lines, e-mail, and the telephone system might indicate that a public relations message has been successful, however; the ensuing chaos assuredly is not in the best interests of the organization. Therefore, messaging must be targeted and focused on primary objectives. Finally, a third success factor in using the Internet for public relations is that it can be used for both internal and external stakeholders. Whether an organization is in the midst of a banner year or whether it is in crisis, the stakeholders

want answers. Public relations via the Web platform is an inexpensive, efficient, and effective means of communications.

The intersection of crisis management and the Internet represents a viable and effective management strategy, and can be a vital part of crisis management (see Chapter II, Part IV, Chapter III, Parts, I, II, and III, and Chapter IV). Perry, Taylor & Doerfel's empirical examination of Web-based crisis communication offers unique evidence of the value of such use. While as noted in the beginning of this Chapter, many organizations have yet to recognize and act on the use of the Internet in this manner, there are numerous activities in public relations that are now beginning to surface, perhaps without any explicit understanding that such use is important to crisis management. These uses in public relations include the development of relationship via the Internet and improved messaging to stakeholders via the Internet.

Many scholars and practitioners consider media operations and public relations activities within organizations as necessarily distinct. While public relations and media operations are similar in that they both have messaging-based tasks and objectives as their foundation, it is commonly believed that organizations are better served having them as separate processes altogether (including separate staff). The reason for this is that public relations constituencies are many and varied and ever changing while media has but one constituency—the press. In short, public relations operations are designed to influence stakeholders and various aligned and non-aligned constituencies. Media operations are designed for one purpose—to provide liaison to the press, including newspaper and television reporters, journal and other periodical reporters, and any other journalistic entity working under the guise of the media.

Seda wrote, "Online press releases allow you to draw the interest of journalists actively hunting for new story ideas. They've opted in to newswire services that send press releases by e-mail, and they search newswire sites daily. One press release can be distributed to tens of thousands of writers, reporters, media outlets, and news-rooms. You can get interview requests an hour after your press release is sent, and then again months later, because it's indexed by newswire service sites and search engines" (1).

Regenold concluded that modern day reporters no longer value press conferences and more traditional journalistic research as in the past. He stated they consider it an inefficient use of time, instead concentrating on the Web, e-mail, and telephone interviews. In part, the new mode of reporting has come about as a result of the sheer volume of information available. But the Web clearly has had an impact on process. Regenold described a "Comprehensive online newsroom," established as an information gathering place for reporters, one that is, "Set to go live with the lift of the press embargo on the day of the event. The password-accessible *Web* page includes the news release, images, a FAQ area, media contact information, QuickTime video clips, logos and other materials for download" (3). This is indeed an effective way of dealing with the reporters' needs for quick information recovery.

While some reporters cite anxiety over using the Web as a primary source of information for their copy, few seem to shy from its use. Many executives and public officials argue that reporters are not inclined for fast paced in-depth work assignments (does this mean lazy?); others say that there is just too much information now

available for the development of articles. Reporters look for comprehensive sources that include copy, citations, images, and biographical information.

Under either circumstance, the Web can be used as a primary source of information. Reilly, as a campaign investigative reporter wrote, "I put aside some slight moral pangs and started to use my friend's password to read the subscription only Web publication...heading to the Internet made this journey one I could accomplish at my desk using my computer" (27). He ultimately developed a comprehensive online library of resources that he regularly consulted for story development. Callison concluded, "Now more than ever, members of the media are surfing the Internet looking for information to bolster stories and for story ideas in general. The Seventh Annual Middleburg/Ross Survey of Media in the Wired World found that the percentage of journalists using the Internet for article research had increased from 66% in 1995 to 92% in 2001. In fact, the survey revealed that 81% of print journalists go online at least once a day for research, and magazine journalists reported that corporate Web sites are their first choice for information when a story breaks and no live source is available. Not surprisingly, journalists agreed that the Internet has made their jobs easier and improved the quality of their work" (29).

In the early days of the newspaper, reporters sat in the courtroom for hours, waiting for tidbits to place in their copy. Now, reporters cut and paste dockets and judicial procedures without leaving their desks. What took a full day now requires a few minutes. Granted there are other issues at stake here such as work assignments and staffing. It is likely the advent of Internet research and reporting has added more work to a reporters' list of responsibilities because they can be more efficient in

writing copy. However; the Internet is an area of development used by organizations in telling their stories, and in the newsrooms as a means of filtering the information for the public. The implication for crisis management is that, through the use of the Web, reporters have a significantly expanded research capability. They can much more easily make a case using this increased access and connectivity. In just a few moments reporters can have comprehensive information about an individual and an organization, with the ability to clip data for their copy.

Media has changed with the evolution of the Internet. While there are valid reasons to hold press conferences and for reporters to cover them, especially for political or other reasons, it is clear the give and take of the Web will only increase in exposure. For all types of organizations, the Web is a valid platform for information delivery to both internal and external stakeholders.

#### *Human Resources and Internal Communication*

The Web platform is functional, efficient, and flexible for HR functions in businesses, higher educational institutions, and non-profits. Most HR functions can be placed in the organization's Intranet and can be responsive or interactive platforms, including payroll, forms distribution, expense request and reimbursement, vacation/sick leave, evaluations, petty cash reimbursement, employee recruitment and more. Staff editors in the journal of *Human Resources Management Report* wrote that the benefits of having most of the HR functions online include 1) users and employees want to be self sufficient; 2) employees have 24/7 access without roadblocks; and 3) the paperwork load is significantly reduced for both administrators

and employees” (3). Smethurst concluded that the Web is an exceptional tool for employee recruiting. He stated that while employers have to sift through unqualified applicants, more and more job hunters are using the Web as both a primary and secondary means of employment search” (38). This view has a large body of research and evidence supporting it.

Long and Smith examined the human resources field and Web-based distance learning, and found an extremely high degree of efficiency and effectiveness, “The use of technologies such as WBDL (Web-based distance learning) that allow employees to learn from a distance may grow in popularity as they allow organizations to meet their immediate and strategic needs for a flexible, well-trained workforce (Kosarzycki et al., 2002). Further, WBDL promises lower distribution costs for just-in-time training at anytime to any location (Simmons, 2002)” (273). While long distance applied technologies, including television, video recording, and paper have had an impact on learning in the HR arena, nothing to date has been as influential as the Web. The programs are popular, interactive, sometimes entertaining, and very effective.

Emphasizing the increased use of the Internet in HR, recent media stated, “A sharp increase in the number of companies providing detailed information to help employees become better health care consumers” (Financial Executive 11). The following table illustrates specific data from the survey:



“Percent of Employers Providing Employees with Information Online

Specific Health Issues

2003	38%
2004	42%
2005	71%

Provider and/or Hospital Quality

2003	16%
2004	23%
2005	35%

Healthcare Service Unit Price

2003	4%
2004	11%
2005	20%” (11)

These data show dramatic increases in one area of HR, and research shows that many functions of HR are now online.

Once primarily a culture of memoranda and meetings, American business is changing the way it communicates to internal audiences. The Web is an extraordinary mechanism for messaging within an organization. Denton and Richardson found, “The power of the Intranet is that it can be used as a real-time tool for managing change and showing evolving changes within the organization. Intranets can be used to track these changes right before your eyes and can give people a clearer sense of purpose” (2). The Web as an Intranet platform is also an excellent tool for use as a barometer of the organizational employee climate. Denton & Richardson examined this issue and found that both employees and management gained from the ease and efficiency of Intranet use for various types of discourse forums. “These changes can then be compared to changes in other important

outcomes. Human resources managers and chief executive officers are not normally aware of the sentiments of their employees and how they are affected by management directives and decisions. It is true that some companies, and particularly human resources departments, have used employee feedback and surveys for years to design and refine programs, but its potential has not been fully realized. The capability exists today to build surveying into a powerful enterprise tool using the power of the Intranet. The possibility exists to craft policy and programs on the fly and, as never before, deal with fast-changing business conditions” (4). The implication is that by continually monitoring the “pulse” of employees and employee organizations through the use of the Intranet, management can assess and remedy unsettled situations.

In so doing, not only is management getting a heads up on problem areas within the company, but also creating and fostering positive relationships with employees. Continuing this discussion and overlapping a bit into the discussion on crisis communication, it is important to note the potential use of the Internet and Intranet in the area of development of an efficient and healthy organizational discourse community. A healthy discourse community has the ability to inhibit the incidence of crisis events and mitigate damage from crises when they occur. Egelhoff & Sen wrote, “Generally, such crises cannot be completely averted, but sometimes the effect of the crisis can be mitigated by action taken after a warning and also by effective postcrisis action” (461). This means that there is exemplary vertical and horizontal messaging within the organization and that the organization communicates well with its external communities. In communicating well within the organization

and externally, the organization is creating relationships that later might act as buffers during crises.

Organizations that initiate a process of crisis management do tend to consider increased internal efficiency in messaging as an integral part of the evaluation and implementation of crisis strategy. As noted in other parts of this dissertation, one of the most important first steps in developing a crisis management strategy is an assessment of vulnerability and an examination of the efficiency of vertical and horizontal organizational messaging. My research leads me to conclude that such examinations, while perhaps temporarily causing anxiety between employees and management, ultimately creates a more efficient, and stable HR environment. Web messaging and other tools must be part of these evaluations.

For example, managers might look at the extent to which employees write emails to the file, to their secretaries, and to their managers providing a paper trail for actions they have taken on certain issues. Such actions may take place because of a mistrust of management, or the employee may be establishing a pattern of communication that would later develop into litigation against the employer. This is a management issue as well as an HR issue that should be dealt with through HR evaluations and policy development. An assessment for the development of crisis management strategy would be an excellent time to understand the occurrences of this type of messaging and why they are occurring. Ultimately, some type of policy on the practice might be included as an element of a crisis plan.

In summary, the work of internal management and HR was once a discipline of paperwork, forms, and constant employee visits to counselors for a host of reasons.

With the advent of the Web, Internet and the Intranet, most of the work in HR can be accomplished online. Employees appreciate the access offered by the Web platform, and inventory or accountability assessments can be handled by data collection through Intranet transactions. HR is one of the most important functions of the online environment in an organization.

### *Conclusions*

Rao, Metts, & Mora Monge wrote that the world has in the past decade, “Witnessed the proliferation and hypergrowth of the Internet and Internet technologies, which together are creating a global and cost-effective platform for businesses to communicate and conduct commerce. McMillan reported staggering U.S. Commerce Department estimations of 320 million homepages and over 1 billion users of the Web by 2005 (80).

Although there is no agreement in terms of a specific amount, there is no doubt that the growth of e-commerce is now and will continue to be of enormous proportions (\$2.2 trillion by 2004 according to Arthur Andersen, \$1.3 trillion by 2003 according to Legg Mason Wood Walker, and \$2.7 trillion by 2004 according to Forester Research)” (11, 12). Clearly, e-commerce in the business sector is thriving as a major source of visibility and sales. Likewise, retail stores are cashing in as consumers look to the Internet for products. License! Journal, reporting data from Forrester Research, stated 2004 online sales of \$141.4 billion, an increase of 23.8% over 2003. Projected online sales in 2005 are \$172.4, an increase of 22% over 2004. Of the reporting industries estimating their income from online sources, the following

statistics apply: 48% of computer sales are online; 28% of ticket sales are online; 20% of book sales are online; and about 12% of consumer electronics, cosmetics, toys & video games, and flowers are online sales (14). A harbinger of things to come, New Media Age Journal reports that a third of children (57%) between the ages of 10 and 19 already shop online. Further, 69% of this age group is already aware of shopping comparison Internet sites, such as “PriceGrabber” and “Kellcoo” (11).

Yet even with this tremendous growth and energy, and considering the progress made integrating the Web into their management schemes, there is still evidence that for the most part organizations are neither using nor recognizing the Internet to maximum potential for communications strategies. Ranchhod concluded, “Companies tend to spend a great deal of time planning strategies, and sometimes they fail to take into account the full implications of implementing such strategies” (262). His statement is relevant with regard to how successful organizations utilize the Internet in the face of the modern work environment.

As with many areas of planning, strategies may be relevant and successful, but with unforeseen consequences—that is, an organization may enjoy thriving Internet sales and marketing successes, but fail to shore up other areas of management. A hypothetical example might be a local hardware store that finds an online niche selling lawnmower parts purchased in China, and sold to local markets—not an uncommon scenario. When profits grow, management diverts sales employees to the online business, thus reducing service to the retail establishment. The online activity thus becomes a threat to the mother ship.

Another hypothetical example might be in a university setting as a crisis management team decides to allow employee blogging via the Intranet as a means of information dissemination. Yet, the first time that there is a crisis event at the organization, the media requests an open records search for all the blogs that have been written in the past few months. Reporters are quick to take employee comments out of context for the purpose of the articles written on the subject of the crisis. The blogging, seemingly an innovative way of increasing employee productivity, ultimately causes harm. As organizations enjoy the management strengths of the Web, they can also find themselves suddenly vulnerable in terms of the increasing volatility of the work environment. Armour suggested that on-the-job blogging is becoming an employment issue in many areas of commerce. “Delta Air Lines, Google and other major companies are firing and disciplining employees for what they say about work on their blogs, which are personal sites that often contain a mix of frank commentary, freewheeling opinions and journaling...And it's hardly just an issue for employees: Some major employers such as IBM are now passing first-of-their-kind employee blogging guidelines designed to prevent problems, such as the online publishing of trade secrets, without stifling the kinds of blogs that can also create valuable buzz about a company” (Money 01b).

Returning to an often discussed issue in this dissertation, research shows evidence that strategic crisis planning can benefit through tactical use of the Web for development of crisis management strategies and for long-term communication benefits—also clearly an issue in crisis management. Research does not show

evidence that organizations in any particular market niche are embracing this concept, in spite of its proven advantages.

In a personal interview with an executive from a major, Atlanta-based company, we discussed the concept of utilization of the Web as a management tool in crisis management. The somewhat dismissive response was that so long as the plan would not cost any money, take time away from the routine operations of management, or affect in any way their market share, it would be fine to proceed with a plan. The inference I received from this discussion was that priorities were so strongly centered on the delivery of quality products and profit motivation that other, conceivably less important topics would be subordinated. This is not necessarily a bad thing—it exemplifies why many companies are competitive. Plus, there is no doubt that the company has navigated its way through many crises—distribution problems, employee problems, quality assurance problems and others. Perhaps they were planned for, perhaps they were not.

As with the majority of American organizations, the idea of crisis management doesn't really resonate, except that when one comes about. Use of the Internet for strategic communication management and involvement in crisis planning is not on the radar.

Grounded in the examination of many cases studies both in this dissertation and in scholarly examination, it is evident that modern organizations are not recognizing the new information environment and the affect the Internet is having on that information environment. Part of this in fact has to do with a dedication to the primary mission of their respective organizations. However; much of it also involves

a general underestimation of the relevance of the influence of that information environment on organizational operations.

Granted, we do not know what the face of organizational dynamics will be in the future. If the recent Pew Foundation research is accurate, we may be moving away from tightly formed organizational structures within the confines of a structure. It is reasonable to assume that as energy prices rise and the costs increase of bringing people into expensive urban buildings to work, people will use more telecommuting and communicate via home or remote office technology. This seems to be happening as we speak. At the same time, many scholars view the Web as an excellent mechanism to bring together an organization's discourse community—whether that means the internal or external publics. The evolution of this aspect of the Internet and organizational dynamics in the future will be fascinating.

In this context, a comprehensive communication plan using the Web as a delivery platform provides a number of benefits including encouraging the health of the discourse community and helping the organization conduct its business in routine operating periods, and also in times of crisis.

In the 1960's, Frank Licklider envisioned a "Galactic Network" of connected computers, owned by both businesses and individuals that would connect the world's intellectual assets for commerce, entertainment, education and most other things that humans do. Fifty years later, Licklider's network is coming true. From an organizational perspective, the Internet is evolving into an all-in-one mechanism for sales, administration, media, public relations, marketing, advertising, and communication.

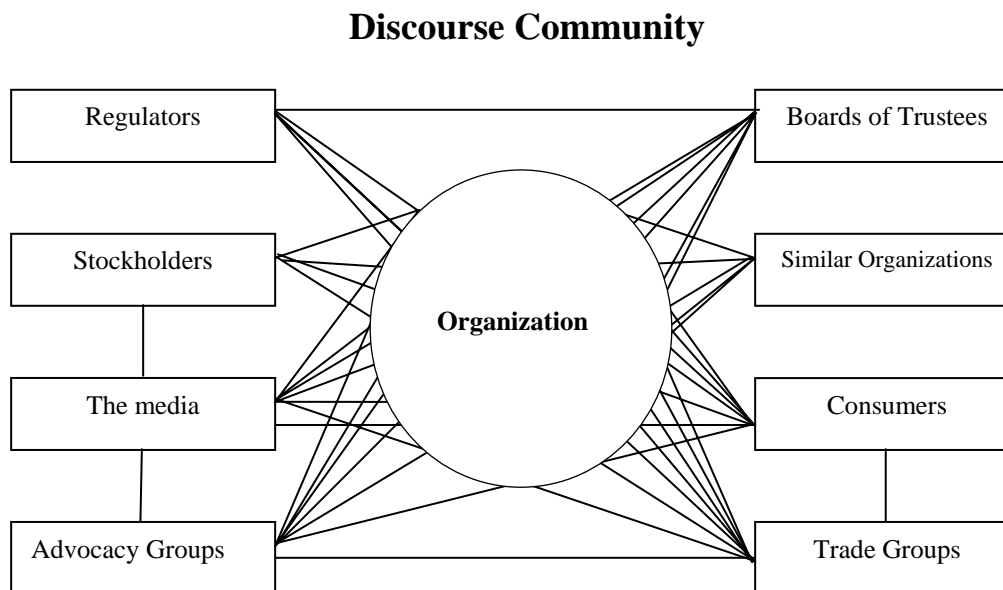


As with many innovations, change comes slow to people, governments and business, however; there is no question that in time, the Internet will play an even more important role in the operations of most organizations. The Web as a communication platform is a growing part of the world's organizational transactions. It enjoys many of the facets of organization that we often consider vital. The Web is fast, it has no boundaries of operation (it can just as easily communicate within a single dwelling or around the globe), it can carry enormous chunks of information, and it is a comprehensive platform from the perspective of other media. In this I mean that it can bring together all other media types—sound, video, print copy and a combination thereof under one platform. If you were to design a communication device that would meet the needs of all types of organizations, it is doubtful one could be created in a more comprehensive manner than the Web.

As the Web grows from its infancy to juvenile and then adult status in years to follow, it is likely we will see much greater dependence on the Web for communication in all types of organizations. Whether the evolution will change the nature of our society as predicted in some scholarly publications remains to be seen. There is no question that the Web allows communication to take place from remote locations unlike any other platform. Therefore, we can assume that more people will be working from those locations, and there will be a change in the dynamics of various types of organizations as a result of the net. The degree of this change is yet to be seen, however; it is likely that communication via the Internet platform will transform many of our concepts of current day organizational structure and function in ways we have yet to envision.

CHAPTER III: EXAMINATION OF THE DISCOURSE COMMUNITY:  
STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT

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*Introduction*

A discourse community is composed of a group or individuals within a body of collective interest in which communication routinely occurs. One might consider a discourse community as the world in which an organization lives comprised of vital and non-vital messages. My research indicates that the Internet has increased the size, activity, distances and the influence of stakeholders.

As the illustration above shows, a discourse community has many conversations taking place sequentially, concurrently and continually. Conversations between individuals flow internal to internal, internal to external, external to external, external to internal and external to external—all related to the organization in some way or form.

Is there any involvement in this discourse community that might give inkling as to potential hotspots causing a crisis event? Discussion of this is partly the subject matter of this chapter, however; in short there are systematic and strategic methods for approaching the needs of the organization involving communication.

A person or group may be supportive or antagonistic in a discourse community. A garden club might be an advocacy group and a part of the discourse community of the Sierra Club. A “Friends of the Environment” advocacy group is a part of the discourse community of a nuclear power plant, though the relationship would probably be antagonistic in nature.

The identification of individual stakeholders and stakeholder groups is an important part of an organizational analysis. However; in general, stakeholders are a very dynamic group of people and groups. In examining this issue, van der Merwe, Pitt, & Abratt concluded, “The Internet has the potential to express the positions not only of organizations, but those of different *stakeholders* in the communication process (Berthon, Pitt and Watson, 1996; Coombs, 1998; Heath, 1998; and Naude, Froneman and Atwood, 2004). The strength of these *stakeholders* has varied in the past, with government and regulators exercising considerable power, investors and some suppliers notable power, and the power of customers and intermediaries ranging from substantial in some cases, to inconsequential in a majority of other. However; the Internet is permitting all *stakeholders* of an organization to exercise significant strength, and in many cases this can have substantial consequences. It is fair to say that a majority of organizations probably do not have considered strategies in place to deal with the strength the new media affords *stakeholders*. From a PR perspective the

effects of Internet induced *stakeholder* strength can be extensive” (39). Herein, van der Merwe, Pitt, & Abratt are stating not only that stakeholders represent a key element of an organization’s management strategy, but also that the Internet is a major factor in their individual and collective influence.

On the issue of stakeholder relationships, Mau & Dennis characterized antagonistic stakeholders as “shadow constituencies.” “These are individuals and groups outside traditional corporate spheres of influence whose opinions may not affect the bottom line immediately, but can affect the public’s perception of a company. And since public perception often becomes reality, shadow constituencies may well affect an organization’s operations and its profitability” (10). van der Merwe, Pitt, and Abratt & Perry, Doerful, and Taylor suggest that these and other stakeholders are empowered by the Internet’s ease of use and its heightened level of visibility.

A person or group does not have to be logistically nearby to be part of a discourse community. For example a writing composition professor at the University of Washington is very much a part of the discourse community of other composition professors at Boston College and the University of Miami. That they give papers and presentations to each other at various conferences is important to the discourse community. However; the vitality of the relationship is more than that. In the case of writing composition professors or chemistry fellows or eminent scholars in physics, there is a kinship of intellectual and perhaps philosophical affiliation between the members. They examine similar discussions; they consider related and disparate topics; they argue among themselves in person or in their papers on topics ranging

from the mundane to the significant. This type of kinship may be attributed to many types of relationships within a given discourse community.

A discourse community may be dynamic (fluid), and alignment with other groups or individuals is sometimes dynamic. People or groups associated with an organization may be a discourse community one day, and the next day completely disassociated. For example, in the 2005 tragedy incident involving Terry Shiavo, a young woman on life support whose parents lost numerous court cases to maintain that life support, there were a number of temporary discourse communities affixed to the parents. The political community, which arguably used the parents and the young woman as a pawn for their own reasons would likely never again be involved with the Shiavo's, yet they were surely part of a temporary discourse community. The attorneys representing the family were also part of the temporary discourse community. The advocacy groups such as the spokespersons from the right-wing group Operation Rescue became a discourse community and then abruptly departed—probably never to be seen again by the parents. The hospitals, doctors, nurses and support personnel of the facilities in which Mrs. Shiavo was resident were at once part of the discourse community, and when she died, the link ceased to exist. The Shiavo case is a simplistic example of a temporary discourse community related to a family and not an organization. However; it is a reasonable comparison to an organization which faces temporary and perhaps one-time issues only for a discourse community formed as a result of that issue to evaporate.

In typical organizational dynamics, productivity is tied to effective and efficient communication structures. Whether the issue is production, human resource

services, media delivery or any one of several types of management, an excellent communication flow is necessary for efficiency. Many researchers, some already noted in this dissertation, have examined the relationship between the health of the discourse community and productivity. Conrad and Poole directly tie organizational conflict to communication issues, “We will define **conflict** more broadly as communication between people who depend on one another and who perceive that the others stand between them and the realization of their goals, aims or values... This definition encompasses... everyday discussions or organizational policies and projects, negotiations between employees or groups of employees and cooperative attempts to find mutually acceptable solutions to problems” (316).

Berdayes argued, “Language is thus the basic vehicle for constituting the somatic field of modern organizations” (39). In this statement, Berdayes is using the critical word *somatic* to denote structural foundation, or the intrinsic underpinning that not only holds the organization together, but also helps to define its character. He also postulated, echoing the works of Foucault, that there are three rules establishing a schema essential to a discourse community, “Examination, hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment... these are tacitly accepted organizing principles embedded in texts, artifacts and [organizational] practices” (40). Berdayes offered principles of organizational management, including, “1) The rationalization of work processes and organizational structure with an emphasis on elaborating a clear hierarchical division of labor; 2) forging the organization, whether by thoroughly formalizing the work process in its totality or by delineating clear lines of command into a conceptual and functional unity; 3) an emphasis on formal rationality,

expressed by explicitly championing “scientific” techniques or by reformulating human relations based on abstract principles believed to insure order and efficiency” (40).

Berdayes also reasoned that there are principles upon which organizations are structured and which are primarily centered and melded by language. He suggested that managers exercise *examination, observation and judgment* to understand and resolve discourse community issues. While these principles of management were offered in administering organizations exclusive of issues of health or crisis, the same functions are precisely those suggested by crisis management scholars as a means to predict and manage crises.

Conrad & Poole, Berdayes and others therefore assign the relationship between people, and specifically communication between people as key elements in the health of the discourse community and they equate low strength of the discourse community to conflict. With these assumptions as backdrop, we can examine the discourse community and its stakeholders and develop strategies and tactics for targeted messaging. The ultimate objective of this is to search for elements of communication that resonate with stakeholders and attempt to influence them to the benefit of the organization.

*Part I: Messaging to, from, and within a Discourse Community*

A political campaign is an outstanding communications laboratory, with many parallels for communication strategy within a discourse community. In a political campaign, the *merchandise* being sold is not a piece of equipment, or food, or clothes—each of which can be quantified with some degree of authenticity, consistency and practical usage. The product for sale in a campaign is a person who possesses a certain set of characteristics that, if assessed from a distance might present many conflicting thoughts and views. In fact, one of the interesting (and perhaps worrisome) facets of a campaign is that while candidates possess stated objectives or perhaps idealistic leanings, most issues are up for grabs in an election within a set of philosophical boundaries. If a candidate begins the race fixated on a certain issue with a leaning this way or the other, and he finds that the electorate abhors that view, it is likely his view will shift toward public opinion. The winds of the public will are very persuasive, and a candidate is often very malleable.

For example, if casino gambling is an issue in a campaign, none but the most conservative candidate might state outright he is opposed to it; conversely, none but the most liberal candidate might state outright he is absolutely in favor of it. The majority of candidates from either major party will take a look at poll numbers, and settle in the mainstream area. If, for some reason, there is a pressing need to move away from a certain position, a candidate and his strategists will examine the public will very closely and move in that direction. Occasionally a candidate will stake out a strong position on an issue from the outset. In those cases, campaign strategists have



examined public opinion and determined either that the stance will not hurt them; or perhaps that it might help them.

Therefore, the very basis of a campaign is what I call *dynamic targeted communication*—a useful operating principle in all organizations in crisis mode and otherwise. The very purpose of a campaign is to influence voters to support a candidacy and to vote for a person they will likely never know, meet or perhaps not even understand. While the purpose of an organization is to do something quite different depending on the type of organization, pursuing a communications strategy that targets members of the discourse community is a valid concept.

The discourse community in a political campaign is comprised of every single voter within the election borders and hundreds if not thousands of groups and organizations assembled in countless ways depending of course on the scope of the election. Voters listen to what the media say about a candidate; the media writes about what the campaign says about the candidate; and, the candidate rarely surfaces to dispute the mass of information that is in the public's view. Dynamic targeted communication is rooted in describing the product. But it is also telling the public what they want to hear. It is persuasion in a very pure sense.

Campaign disclosures on a candidate's views are not attempts to deceive the public—whether in a campaign. They are about a mindset of communication that examines, develops strategy and implements on the basis of that examination and the ensuing strategy. Listening to the sentiment of the discourse community is not a deceitful thing, it is smart policy.

A political campaign is in constant crisis mode. The stakes are to win or lose—with no middle ground. Elections, careers, reputations, lifestyles, and even public policies are based almost entirely on the effectiveness of the campaign communication strategy. A single headline can be a devastating blow to a candidacy, or it can catapult a candidate to office. One of the most famous political gaffes in recent memory occurred during a Presidential debate between Vice President Gerald Ford and Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter. On October 6, 1976 in the second Presidential debate of the year, responding to a question from a journalist panel on national television, Gerald Ford insisted that Eastern Europe was not held captive under the regime of the Soviet Union. Carter looked astonishingly at Ford, and the debate presenters asked the question again, only to receive the same erroneous answer from Ford that Eastern Europe was a sovereign power. It was a stunning turning point in the campaign—all on the basis of a single misstatement.

My experiences in participating in numerous campaign and political strategy sessions is that politicians have views generally within a framework of their political organization (party), but within those parameters seldom offer few entrenched ideas. To do so would excite some voters and turn others off, especially in today's extremely polarized political environment. A candidate often walks a very thin line in supporting the mainstream of public issues necessary to effectively run a campaign.

Thus, what a political campaign lacks in substance, it makes up for in explanation. Given that most voters will never have a chance to meet the candidate

and they must make decisions on the campaign by way of what they read about it in the media, political strategists must derive their success in their messaging strategies.

In a political campaign there is constant analysis by the candidate and subordinates on the refinements of messages. Further, once a message has been sent to the media, it is not uncommon for campaign workers to insure proper attention by *spinning* the message toward specific target markets. What this means is that a candidate makes a statement, and campaign media personnel tell a group of voters exactly what this means to them. This tactic works well especially since candidates seldom make lengthy and complicated statements—they give *sound bites* to the media through many media sources.

The spin subsequently launches a bevy of surrogates to meet with various individuals and groups to explain what the candidate really said—that was of course likely written by the same staffers the night before. This serves several purposes including the ability to manipulate the same message for many types of groups, but it also insulates the candidate in the event a message is negatively perceived by one or more constituencies. An often used tactic is when this happens for a surrogate to spin the message in a way more amenable to that particular group. Therefore, in a world of messaging and spinning, campaigns tell the world how their candidate feels on every subject and any subject.

For example, as a young campaign worker for a Presidential campaign many years ago, I was sent by campaign directors around the State of Florida to give testimony to my candidate's views on a number of subjects, even though I had never once met the candidate. I had a reasonable command of the subject matter and a

working knowledge of the media. Thus, I was a fine spin agent for the candidate. I was an extension of the candidate who could enhance the message and influence the voters. If I made a comment to the media that was not appropriate (which I often did), it was easy enough for the campaign to simply state that I was wrong—that the candidate really did not agree with the statement.

After the news programming is complete for the day, it is the time for candidates and strategists to sit around the conference table to examine how successful they were in getting across the desired messages. Each news bite is scrutinized and notes are taken to contact reporters for follow-ups, refinements, and occasionally requests for clarification. A quality campaign leaves no stone unturned because each *hit* received by the public could turn votes and lose elections. Some candidates refer to the product of this extreme messaging environment as a grassroots campaign—where candidates utilize a vertical hierarchy that extends to the neighborhood level in their messaging and organizational tactics. In essence, each community receives its own set of messages within the context of their perceived interests.

I mentioned that campaigns are constantly in the crisis mode. This is as a result of the short-term nature of political campaigns and because there is so much riding on day-to-day decisionmaking. While a campaign is an exhilarating experience, it rivals the most anxious moments in any crisis from the perspective of those involved in the complex environment.

Is it reasonable to suggest that organizational messaging should equate to the intensity and pressure of a political campaign? Perhaps not precisely, however; there

are compelling comparisons to be made. Most importantly, we can derive from a campaign the significance of messaging as a strategic objective of excellence. Executives should consider the communication strategies emanating from their organization to be every bit as important and consequential as in a political campaign—in a crisis mode or otherwise. These strategies can be examined and implemented on a macro-level or a micro-level—from broad tactics in which organizational objectives are written and refined, to individual discussions and documents sent to media or other stakeholders.

How then, does management *control* the systematic communication flow and patterns in an organization and mold some type of strategy upon which a crisis plan hinges? Better put, can all of the elements of a discourse community be examined and modified for better communication (even under the best circumstances)?

Forman discussed the concept of “strategic discourse,” as, “The language and underlying concepts of corporate strategy, the processes and plans that allow a company to *marshal* and *allocate*...resources into a *unique* and viable posture based on its relative *internal competencies and shortcomings*, anticipated *changes in the environment*, and contingent moves by *intelligent opponents*” (282). Her hypothesis is central to the theme of understanding and communicating with an organizational discourse community.

“*Strategy* is not a buzzword. To be a strategic thinker means several things: to articulate a point of view about the future of the organization in a contested area where others are vying for attention and resources, to take into account all pertinent external and internal issues that open

up or constrain the future direction of an organization, to listen as well as to debate and then provide leadership for strategic change.

The discourse community can indeed be examined with strategic plans affixed to them, but it is reasonable to assume that ancillary organizations within the discourse community themselves may not be modified. For example, assuming that an external discourse community is tied to an organization, no amount of interaction with the organization can compromise the mission or likely actions by the organization. Would the Sierra Club develop an affiliation with the power company? Would the Sierra Club ever have a power generation division or the President of the local chemical production company as its honorary president? Of course not! Each organization is indeed part of the other's discourse community, however; except under unusual cases no amount of interaction would alter the course of either organization. It is a given that the two organizations would always have an antagonistic relationship.

As noted earlier in research by Grunig & Grunig and van der Merwe, Pitt & Abratt, greater access by elements of the external discourse community offers both challenge and opportunity. *An educated discourse community is not always a happy discourse community*, and there very well may be a proportional relationship between awareness and hostility. Even in extremely hostile relationships (perhaps especially so), management can and should examine selected internal organizational structure for the *characteristic of communication* between staff and stakeholders, making changes as needed and upgrading certain areas of messaging. Just as candidates keep track of the negative aspects of both the issues and the polling numbers in their

opinion surveys, organizations should adopt a similar means of examination. Who doesn't like us out there; why don't they like us; How important is it to us that they don't like us; and finally, what can we do about it?

Wright concluded, "Organizations shape their communication strategies to account for the many stakeholder voices that influence corporate policy, value, and reputation" (14). Thus, by examining these relationships—no matter how many there are—an organization can more effectively develop relationships, better anticipate problems, and hopefully reduce negative issues that might be heading in your direction.

Management might also examine and change internal structure and messaging to influence the *quality, substance, and volume* of communication moving externally. Although managing such messaging could easily get tedious and overwhelming if the parameters were not well defined, communication to stakeholders does not have to be random. Communication strategies represent an important link to better efficiency and a more productive communication model both in routine times and in crisis. In essence, by understanding the discourse community and designing strategic messaging, the organization becomes much more efficient and less prone to crisis.

Wright also suggested that stakeholder groups typically have a fundamentally shared interest in the same issues and concerns (14-16). For example, the media is typically one of an organization's most influential stakeholder groups, though most corporate and governmental agency executives would likely be loathe admitting it. Most consider the media at best as pesky, and at worse a less than desirable nuisance because of their constant presence and more than occasional annoyance. Yet the

media is a classic stakeholder. While the connection may be viewed by many as dubious, few outsiders probably know an organization as well as the journalists who write stories about it. Further, while it completely respectable (and expected) among your colleagues to complain about the reporter who covers your organization, the same reporter is the first contact pursued when that same organization needs to get information out to the public. This is understanding the discourse community and using it to your advantage.

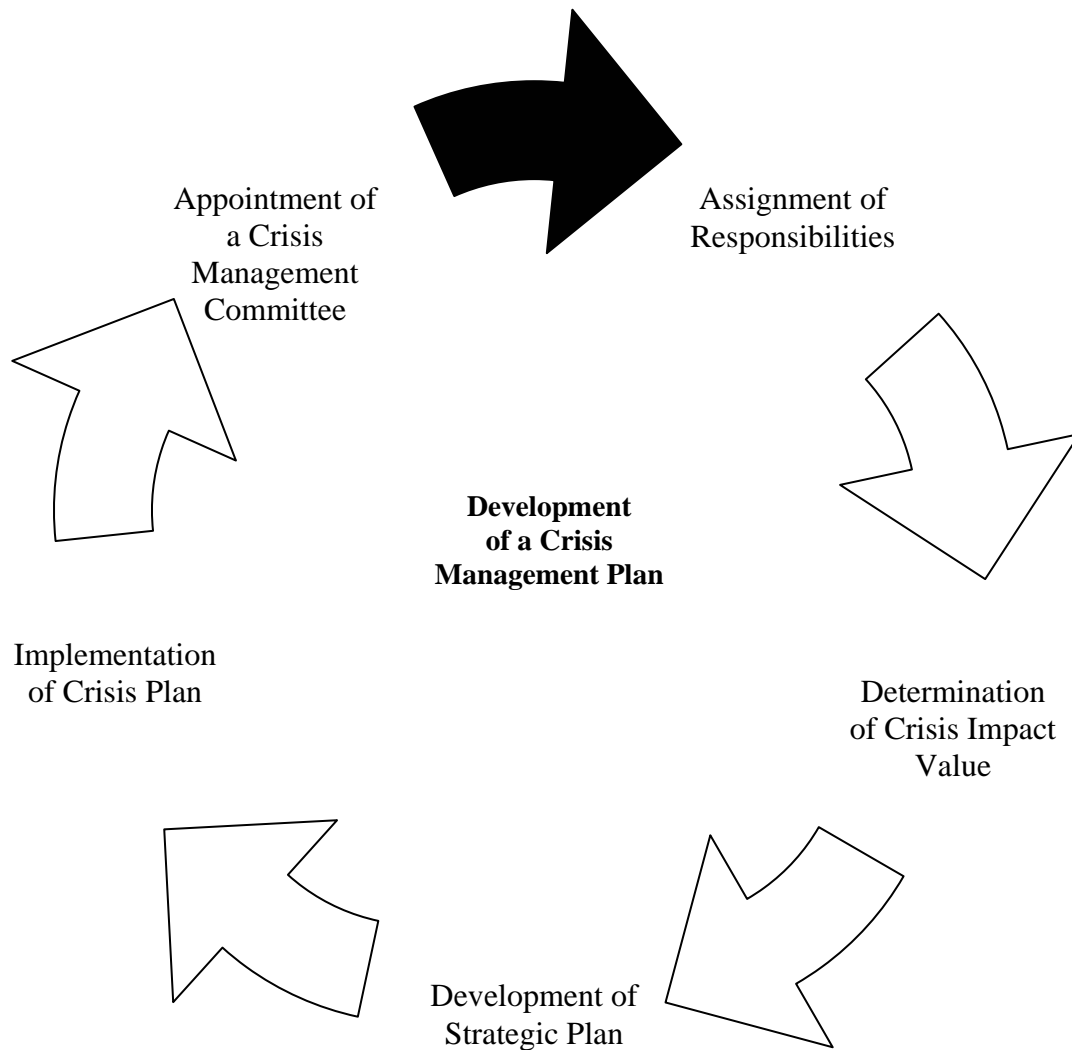
With these factors in mind, is there a distinction between effective routine management of the organizational discourse community and *crisis* management? Clearly, management in a crisis is more difficult, decisions will tend to have more riding on them, and the environment would be more charged. However; if a healthy and efficient discourse community is fundamental to a healthy organization, then we can also conclude that the same holds true for crisis management. The communication culture of an organization influences its ability to reduce the incidence crisis, and when crisis events occur, diminishes the effects of crisis. This culture includes the way people interact, the way they trust each other, communicate with each other, and their acceptance of organizational policies and procedures.

An exemplary discourse community in which stakeholder messaging is strategic, well-organized, and resourceful will not insulate an organization from crisis, but it certainly will make that organization more efficient in its operations both in crisis and non-crisis times. By systematically (as Berdayes suggests) examining, observing, and judging discourse elements, the discourse community can be better organized and made more efficient in messaging during both crisis and routine times.



In essence, by managing the discourse community for crisis, an organization also creates a more efficient and hospitable environment for productivity. Scott & Lane concluded that an organization that defines itself without involvement from its many stakeholders is ill-defined. “We argue that organizational identity is best understood as contested and negotiated between managers and stakeholder.” In this statement, Scott & Lane suggest a communication symbiosis between an organization and its stakeholders that transcends simply a buyer-seller link. What Scott & Lane are implying is that through constant interaction with stakeholder groups (both positive and negative), an organization can better position itself in the marketplace, and the discourse community can be nurtured. Just as a candidate moves easily within a set of parameters on an issue to stake his ground, an organization can be just as adept—especially on the important issues.

*Part II: Development of a Crisis Plan*



Organizations that plan for crisis are ahead of the game when crisis occurs.

Notwithstanding the tortuous statistics showing the lack of crisis planning by managers, there is much data showing that assessment and prioritization of issues, examination of probability, assignment of responsibilities, and a judicious direction of resources help defend against crisis. Models in crisis planning range from the very structured to the very unstructured.

Important factors in crisis planning within an organizational discourse community include being cognizant of various publics and stakeholders, understanding the importance of members of the audience, and determining the probability of potential risk factors. Such planning, according to Fink, Conrad and Poole, and others, requires prioritization of what is and is not important, and recognition that the dynamics of crisis management are fluid. Managers should be willing to shift priorities at a moments notice given changes in environmental conditions.

How do administrators analyze their organizations to locate the hot spots, not only in communication but in other functional areas? As discussed in Chapter II, Part IV, the formation of a *crisis management team (CMT)* is important in both formally assessing problem areas and signaling an overall shift in management prerogatives. In effect, by creating a CMT and delegating it broad powers, the management team shows a commitment to both vertical and horizontal examination of both defects and opportunities in the organization *and* in the discourse community. In so doing, the CMT often establishes a relational matrix correlating probability with a range of issues across the organization to define a *crisis impact value (CIV)*.

The following actions are generally considered as appropriate for development of crisis strategy.

1. Creation of Crisis Management Team and assignment of committee members including alternates when the principle members are not available. Members of the CMT are usually advisory to the chairman of the organization, and consist of senior level company executives.

The following memorandum is an example of a directive from the President to establish the CMT:

### **Memorandum**

To: All Managers and Division Directors  
From: President's Office  
Subject: Formation of a Crisis Management Team

As many of you are aware, last year we spent time and resources responding to issues within our organization that you might call non-routine events. I am the first to state that some of these events could have been prevented. Moreover, all of us involved in the events and aftermath can surely testify that we were not as prepared as we should have been. Today, I am initiating an activity in our organization to evaluate existing and potential issues that might cause a future crisis. Additionally, we want to examine various response mechanisms in our organization that we can use in the event of a man-made or act-of-God type incident.

The objective of this exercise is to form a permanent crisis management committee. This committee will be advisory to me and I will be an ex-officio to the group. I have asked our Vice President for Communications to be chair.

From time to time, the composition of the committee will change depending on the issues on the table and the circumstances of the day. For now, the following officials of this organization are permanent members.

1. VP for Communications, Chair
2. VP for Human Resources, Vice Chair
3. Budget director

4. Chief of Security
5. Engineering Director
6. Board member, as yet unannounced

### **Agenda for First Meeting**

The following items will be discussed at the first meeting of the Crisis

Management Team:

#### Discussion of Committee Objectives

1. Examine communication flow within the organization in non-crisis and during crisis events
2. Identify stakeholders in both the internal and external discourse communities
3. Examine communication flow from internal departments to external organizations and people
4. Establish a process for use during crisis events
5. Identify a chief spokesperson during a crisis event
6. Identify when the crisis management team becomes active during a crisis event
7. Identify crisis team responsibilities and to set limits of responsibilities during a crisis event
8. Identify potential crisis issues in the organization and to give each issue a *crisis intensity value*

9. Prioritize these crisis issues from least important to most important using a numerical value for each issue
10. Identify resources necessary to reduce potential crisis issues to non-crisis status

Appointment of CMT Chair. The chair of the committee is an individual trusted by the chairman of the organization, and someone who usually has organization-wide responsibilities, such as the communications officer or chief human resources officer. Typically, an organization's attorney, budget officer, or engineering director is not the committee chair because it is vital that the employees and stakeholders be willing to and *want* to cooperate with the committee. Having the lawyer or budget person as the chair might achieve the opposite results, if acceptability of various occupations is to serve as a lesson.

Setting CMT Objectives and Responsibilities. The crisis management team sets an ambitious set of objectives including:

1. Provides guidance, advice, and direction to the Chairman on issues that constitute a real, perceived, or potential crisis.
2. Expands or contracts its membership according to need, including the ability to form subcommittees on issues of special interest.
3. Assesses issues in the organization for crisis potential. Crisis potential is defined as a correlation between an issue's crisis intensity and its probability.
4. Ranks crisis issues according to their crisis potential.

5. Determines when the CMT and the organization move into crisis management mode.
6. Provides authority and direction to the chief communications officer on messaging issues during a crisis event.
7. Sets a formal agenda for meetings.

Individual Member Assignments: Composition of the Crisis Management Team.

1. VP for Communications, Chair. Responsible for chairing committee and reporting to Chairman on committee activities and decisions. Also responsible for examining divisional communication issues and coordinating messaging for crisis management.
2. VP for Human Resources, Vice Chair. Responsible for co-chairing CMT, and in the absence of the Chair, assuming chairmanship of the committee. Also, the VP is a key CMT member for facilitating subcommittees in their work on special assignments involving crisis management.
3. Budget Director. Responsible for working with CMT to examine fiscal resources necessary to administratively carry forth the work of the committee; and, to carry out recommendations of the committee concerning refinements or changes in company policy relative to crisis management plans.
4. Chief of Security. Responsible for overall security issues relating to crisis plans. Chief of Security should be able to assist all divisions in

their health, safety, and evacuation plans as well as to integrate physical crisis management issues in the overall work of the committee.

5. Engineering Director. Responsible for coordinating with all divisions concerning engineering or technical issues relating to crisis management plans.
6. Board member, as yet unannounced. Responsible for providing liaison between organization and board of trustees, especially involving routine communication with board on crisis management plans.

Crisis Management Committee Meetings. Determination of who calls the committee to action and under what circumstances.

The crisis management committee will be convened at the call of the Chairman of the organization, the committee chair, or the committee vice chair. The purposes of convening the committee will be in the event of 1) regularly scheduled committee meetings; 2) crisis management drills; or, 3) crisis events. Regularly scheduled meetings will be either at the call of the Chair or the first Monday of each month, time and place to be determined.

Determination of Committee Member Stand-ins: The crisis management committee will be convened at the call of the Chairman of the organization, the committee chair, or the committee vice chair. The purposes of convening the committee will be in the event of 1) regularly scheduled committee meetings; 2) crisis



management drills; or, 3) crisis events. Regularly scheduled meetings will be either at the call of the Chair or the first Monday of each month, time and place to be determined.

The chair will designate an alternate to attend meetings and perform work of the committee in the event the principal member is not available. The following positions are assigned.

1. VP for Communications, Chair
  - a. Alternate, Deputy director for media operations
2. VP for human resources, vice chair
  - a. Alternate, Admissions and enrollment director
3. Budget Director
  - a. Alternate, Deputy fiscal officer
4. Chief of Security
  - a. Alternate, Asst. security officer
5. Engineering Director
6. Facility Director
7. Board member, to be announced
8. Second board member, to be announced

#### Analysis of Stakeholder and Community Issues.

The purpose of this committee activity is to examine external relationships from the organization as a means of strengthening both the relationships and the ongoing messaging. The Chair (chief communication officer) will lead this effort and will work with each committee member and the divisions they represent.

Specifically, each division will itemize all groups and organizations with which the staff maintains contact or that is involved in some way. The external organization need not be in a support or advocacy-type role. In fact, non-supportive relationships may be those that we examine the closest. What we are searching for in this activity is the ability to strengthen relationships and messaging capabilities in those relationships both in routine times and during crisis events. We have provided a form

for use across the organization. The following may be used as an example of the type of information we are seeking:

*Sample Organization*

Organization: Commission for the Advancement of Post-secondary Education

Type of organization: Trade association involving the education industry.

Work of organization: CASE has regularly scheduled events involving training, networking, and professional development. It publishes periodicals such as the Chronicle of Higher Education. It has a research division that specializes in the examination of best practices in higher education and often features the writings of senior officials in the higher education business across the U.S. in various areas of interest.

Existing relationship with CASE. Currently, our institution is significantly involved in CASE activities in the following ways:

1. We have 63 members of CASE at this institution. Dr. John Fellows, Dean of Science is the current CASE deputy chairman (honorary).
2. We have 24 faculty members that contribute to various publications of CASE. A list of the titles of these contributions is attached.
3. This year, 42 staff from this institution will attend CASE conferences in the U.S. and Canada. A list of these conferences is attached.
4. In the years 1997 through the present, CASE's primary publication, the Chronicle of Higher Education featured 23 articles that mentioned this institution. 18 of these articles were positively inclined. 5 dealt with problems and conflicts in our institution.

5. Existing messaging with CASE. Probably too numerous to mention in this context. Typical messaging includes writing articles, letter communication, telephone calls, emails, involvement in professional development both as trainers or participants.
6. Problem or conflict areas.
  - a) Articles in CASE's publication have highlighted or mentioned several problem areas in our institution.
    - i) Solution. Work with media department to develop better relationships with CASE editorial and journalism staff
  - b) Aside from Dr. Fellows, we have no one rising in the honorary administrative area of CASE. These titles serve us well with our accreditation and in a number of scholarly areas.
    - i) Solution. Develop institutional plan for greater involvement with CASE, especially in promoting one of our own to CASE management.
7. Other specific issues or concerns.
  - a) During the past few years, CASE has prioritized fundraising as the predominant issue in their conference work and publications. While this is an important area for us, we are now emphasizing relationship building and government affairs as our most important external activity. It would be to our benefit for a number of reasons if CASE were to redefine their priorities in the direction of external affairs. Therefore, by focusing our attention on these

issues within CASE, we can help to have them refocus on areas more beneficial to our institution.

- b) In various publications, CASE is quick to be critical of our involvement in the areas of stem cell research in the college of biomedical research. While their criticism focuses on Federal funding issues, this criticism often becomes public fodder from our trustees, fundraising organizations, the political establishment, and various public advocacy groups. We believe this criticism will become stronger and louder in the future.
  - c) It should be one of our strongest positions to be work diligently to counter their editorials and articles when we are criticized. One option would be to create a special Web page on the issue of our stem cell research (the crisis management team working in concert with our media division, a journalism consultant and staff in the college of biomedical research to create this Webpage now).
8. A second activity is to insure our media division is prepared to counter with written information each time an article finds its way in the media. Such information would include bios of faculty and administrators involved in stem cell research, articles on the benefits of such study, potential economic development stimuli in related areas of development across the nation. In other words, we should counter criticism with very strong media coming from our direction.

**The following form may be used as a hand-out to all directors for dissemination to employees regarding their relationship with external groups.**

## Sample Form

### Examination of Relationship with External Organization

Division: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact individual:  
\_\_\_\_\_

1. Organization:
2. Type of organization:
3. Work of organization:
4. Existing relationship.
5. Membership involvement with institution
6. Attendance at meetings with organization
7. Articles or copy written by this organization involving institution
8. Types of messaging with organization. Include letters, publications, emailing, and telephone calls as appropriate to mention.
9. Problem or conflict areas. Identify problems and suggested solutions.
10. Other specific issues or concerns.

*Analysis of Crisis Management Issues/ Vulnerability Analysis*

At the core of crisis management strategy is an understanding of issues or activities within an organization that might cause a crisis event to occur. Further, in examination of an organization for crisis management purposes, what issues require refinement or strengthening to reduce the possibility of crisis? These are complex predictive issues that require a somewhat intangible set of instructions as a means of understanding what might happen under certain circumstances.

One of the most informative examinations of issues in a crisis management strategy involves a correlation between probability and a variety of issues that have been rated according to their potential impact on an organization. A detailed discussion of this concept can be found in Chapter II, Part IV. The purpose of this exercise is to provide concrete detail to the process. It is important to note that such an exercise may be undertaken on a formal basis, informal basis, using an external consultant or completely internal. While the results may vary proportionately with the amount of effort an organization puts into crisis strategy, some effort is better than none.

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Proceedings of the Crisis Management Committee:  
Examination of Topics for Crisis Impact Value

[Example: Java Coffee Company]

Franchise Profile: Independent franchise of Java Corporation International. 5 full-time employees, 42 part-time employees. Hours of work: 6:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. days per week. Vertical hierarchy: Store Manager, Sr. Asst. Manager, Asst. Manager for Store Operations, Asst. Manager for Catering, Asst. Manager for Drive up Sales.

The objective of this discussion and activity is to examine topics relevant to our operations. We will consider two types of issues in this exercise. The first involves activities or routine operations issues that staff may wish to consider improving in their daily routine. The second involves more strategic thinking on issues in our organization that constitute potential problem areas. These may be very minor issues or they may be more important things that could potentially hurt our business.

The following steps will take management through the process of developing a crisis impact value:

1. Issue identification. Each staff person should complete the attached form and return to management (See Issues Identification Form below)
2. Issue rating. Each staff person should rate issues on a scale of 1-10 on the basis of the level of problem should that issue occur during operations
3. Probability. Each staff person should give an estimate of the chance of a given issue occurring during operations.
4. Determination of Crisis Impact Value. Staff should divide the Issue rating with the probability to ascertain the CIV.
5. Rating of Problems. Staff should list problem areas from least important to most important.
6. Solutions. Staff should provide possible solutions for all problems noted. When necessary, financial estimates should be noted along with problem areas.

*Form for Issues Identification*

This is a form that might be used to seek feedback from employees in a small business on issues of concern to them. The form gives them an opportunity to express opinions on various areas of operations. Also, by providing a list of issues, it provides an opportunity to prompt their thoughts on topics.

## Issues Identification Form

The objective of this document is to seek your input on issues or activities that you consider important to improving our store operations. These issues may be within the normal purview of your specific job responsibilities or they may be in other areas of interest. Please feel free to express your opinion and to be completely candid with your answers.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

POSITION \_\_\_\_\_

LENGTH OF TIME WITH JAVA \_\_\_\_\_

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES WITH JAVA \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

PROBLEM AREAS

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

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## POSSIBLE HEALTH OR SAFETY CONCERNS

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### POTENTIAL PROBLEM AREAS

1. SALES
  - a. THEFT
    - i. ARMED ROBBERY
    - ii. SHOPLIFTING
    - iii. STEAL AND RUN
  - b. MAKING CHANGE
  - c. OTHER
  - d. CASH REGISTER
    - i. ELECTRICITY SHUTS OFF
    - ii. INCORRECT DATA OUTPUT
2. CUSTOMER SERVICE
  - a. RUDE/HOSTILE CUSTOMERS
  - b. RUDE/HOSTILE STARBUCK EMPLOYEE
  - c. TELEPHONE CALLS DURING OPERATIONS
  - d. OTHER
3. CATERING
  - a. LATE DELIVERIES
  - b. SPOILED FOOD
  - c. WRONG ORDERS
  - d. OTHER
4. DRIVE THROUGH
  - a. POOR COMMUNICATIONS THROUGH SPEAKERS
  - b. AUTOMOBILE COLLISION

- c. LINE TOO LONG
  - d. OTHER
5. BATHROOM AREA
- a. WATER FLOODING OVER APPLIANCES
  - b. LOCKED DOOR WITH CUSTOMER INSIDE
  - c. SMOKE COMING FROM BATHROOM
6. RETAIL AREA
- a. HEALTH/SAFETY CONCERNS
    - i. WATER ON FLOOR
    - ii. FIRE
    - iii. CHEMICAL SPILL
    - iv. CUSTOMER ARGUMENTS/FIGHTS
    - v. ILL CUSTOMER
      - 1. HEART ATTACK
      - 2. ASTHMA ATTACK
      - 3. BURNS FROM COFFEE
      - 4. CHOKING FROM FOOD
      - 5. EYE OR NOSE COMPLICATIONS
      - 6. BROKEN BONES
      - 7. OTHER

*Determination of Crisis Impact Value (CIV)*

With list created after vulnerability identification, rate each issue according to values determined by the committee on a 1-5 basis, with 1 being the least intense and 5 being the most intense.

*Findings/Compilation of Data*

SALES

THEFT

ARMED ROBBERY	4.6
SHOPLIFTING	4.3
STEAL AND RUN	2.9
MAKING CHANGE	1.9

CASH REGISTER

ELECTRICITY SHUTS OFF	2.0
INCORRECT DATA OUTPUT	1.8

CUSTOMER SERVICE

RUDE/HOSTILE CUSTOMERS	3.9
RUDE/HOSTILE STARBUCK EMPLOYEE	1.3
TELEPHONE CALLS DURING OPERATIONS	.5

CATERING

LATE DELIVERIES	3.5
SPOILED FOOD	3.7
WRONG ORDERS	2.9

DRIVE THROUGH

POOR COMMUNICATIONS	
THROUGH SPEAKERS	1.0
AUTOMOBILE COLLISION	3.0
LINE TOO LONG	0.3

BATHROOM AREA

WATER FLOODING OVER APPLIANCES	0.7
--------------------------------	-----

LOCKED DOOR WITH CUSTOMER INSIDE	3.2
SMOKE COMING FROM BATHROOM	0.2

#### RETAIL AREA

HEALTH/SAFETY CONCERNS	3.0
WATER ON FLOOR	1.6
FIRE	0.3
CHEMICAL SPILL	0.6
CUSTOMER ARGUMENTS/FIGHTS	3.3

#### ILL CUSTOMER

HEART ATTACK	4.0
ASTHMA ATTACK	4.0
BURNS FROM COFFEE	4.0
CHOKING FROM FOOD	4.0
EYE OR NOSE COMPLICATIONS	4.0
BROKEN BONES	4.0

After compiling information from staff and management, the following items had a crisis impact value of 3 or above, on CIV scale of 1-5 [listed from most pressing issues to least pressing issues:

Issue	CIV
1. Armed robbery	4.6
2. Shoplifting	4.3
3. Automobile collision in drive-thru	4.0
4. Ill customers while in store	4.0
5. Rude/hostile customers	3.9
6. Spoiled food in catering	3.7
7. Late delivery of food in catering	3.5
8. Customer arguments/fights	3.3
9. Locked bathroom door with customer inside	3.2
10. Health/safety emergency during store hours	3.0

*Assessment of Topics: Consideration of Options*

The following topics will be addressed in the planning phase of the crisis management plan. Each topic has been considered by the Crisis Management Committee and discussed with store management and staff. The numbers following each topic denote the assessment phase of the project in which management and staff determined areas of priority.

1. Armed robbery 4.6
  - a. Hiring a guard to be present in the store from the beginning of the work day to lights out.

- b. Requesting higher visibility with local law enforcement
  - c. Training employees on recognition of threatening customers and rapid notification of law enforcement
  - d. Training employees on non-threatening actions to take during armed robbery
2. Shoplifting 4.3
- a. Hiring a guard to be present in the store from the beginning of the work day to lights out.
  - b. Requesting higher visibility with local law enforcement
  - c. Training employees to spot shoplifting customers
  - d. Training employees on non-threatening actions to take during a shoplifting incident
3. Automobile collision in drive-thru 4.0
- a. Placing caution signage before and along the drive-thru line
  - b. Training employees on actions to take in the event of an incident
4. Ill customers while in store 4.0
- a. Require CPR training of employees at company expense
  - b. Offer CPR training of employees at their expense
  - c. Training employees on actions to take during an incident
5. Rude/hostile customers 3.9
- a. Training employees on actions to take during an incident
  - b. Training employees how to react to rude/hostile customers
6. Spoiled food in catering 3.7

- a. Training catering management and staff how to test for and recognize spoiled food
  - b. Training sales staff what to do in the event customers become ill or complain about spoiled food
7. Late delivery of food in catering 3.5
- a. Relationship building between catering staff and caterer
  - b. Establishing morning checkpoints for catering staff with caterer
  - c. Establishing nighttime checkpoints for catering staff with caterer
8. Customer arguments/fights 3.3
- a. Training employees on actions to take during an incident
  - a. Training employees on spotting incidents before they happen
9. Locked bathroom door w customer inside 3.2
- a. Keeping keys to bathroom convenient when an incident occurs
  - b. Placing a sign in bathrooms with information on locked door
10. Health/safety emergency during store hours 3.0
- a. Training employees on actions to take during an incident. Making assignments for implementation.
  - b. Training employees on spotting incidents before they happen
  - c. Review possible health/safety emergencies with management and staff
  - d. Insuring local law enforcement agencies are familiar with the store, and contact information is posted
  - e. Keeping cell phones available during office hours for emergency use.

### *Actions List*

Note that many of these items require either hiring of new staff (security) or development of training programs (either internally or outsourced). Crisis management committee will assess these topics and attempt to quantify costs for each topic. The following represents an initial list of actions to be taken:

1. Identify personnel who might address the issues to address each issue in terms of occurrence, intensity, and mitigation.
2. Assign necessary fiscal resources for work. Create subcommittees of the crisis management team to address each issue. Insure management across the organization is aware of the work assignments.
3. Require subcommittees to apprise CMT of work agenda, meeting schedule and suggested means of accomplishing the task.

### *Adoption of a Crisis Management Plan*

Strategy Adoption. The chairman of the organization in concert with the crisis management team chair will adopt a strategy informing employees and selected stakeholders of the plan and their respective responsibilities in implementing the plan. The objective of this document is to complete the assessment phase of the crisis management plan and to determine priorities and action items. The following recommendations are made:

The most important issues identified by staff and management fall in three areas of concern, in the order of priority: 1) Criminal actions, unruly customers and unusual activity by customers; 2) health and safety issues concerning food or customer health; and 3) timing issues related to food delivery. The committee has

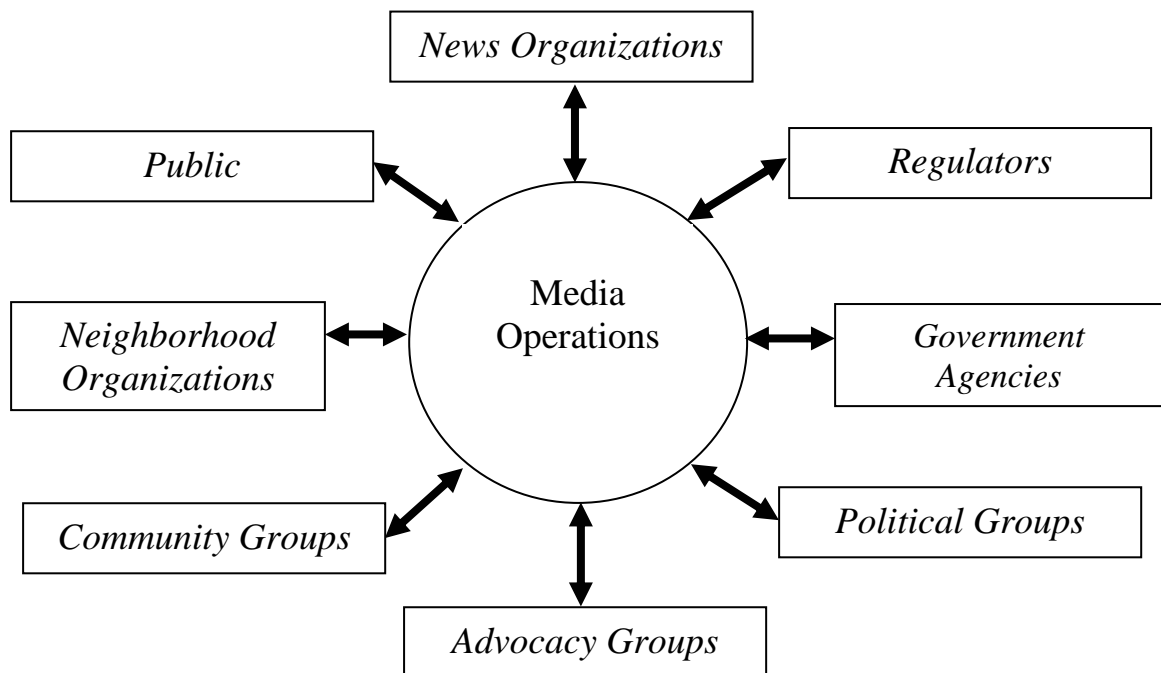


determined that the majority of the issues pertain to health and safety issues. The following decisions are recommended:

1. We will begin immediate training of managers and employees on all aspects of health and safety issues. An outside consultant will be hired to conduct the training. This individual or firm will continue training for a period of one year at which time a follow-up assessment will be made on the progress made on the various issues. The cost of this training will be approximately \$25,000 plus loss of wage time when employees are in training.
2. During the twelve month period, management will begin the process of identifying security firms or individuals to be placed in the store during operating hours. Initial costs of this will be approximately \$47,000 including salary and benefits. Management will decide whether to go forward with this recommendation in twelve months.
3. Local law enforcement officers will be invited to a series of receptions at the store to discuss the security situation. Letters will be sent to city and county fire and police departments requesting that patrol efforts be increased due to crime in the area surrounding the store.
4. All other issues will be addressed using internal training from managers and special consultants. The franchise will designate \$10,000 in the budget for this training. Staff time and wages for this training will be absorbed in the operations budget of the store.

*Part III: Development of a Media Operations Model; Examination of the Discourse Community*

An organizational media division is composed of staff members that interact news outlets and whose primary functions include: 1) providing response to requests for information from the media or other stakeholders; 2) writing copy for publications, newsletters and various informational documents such as pitches and responses; 3) directing journalists to appropriate personnel in the organization for information; and 4) assuming some level of leadership in the organization regarding communication policy, coordination of media response, and in crisis management leadership efforts. Media staff responsibilities typically are not confined to external media organizations. Either working as a sole unit or in conjunction with public affairs or public relations staff, the media staff's responsibilities include strategic messaging to stakeholders identified through an exhaustive examination of the discourse community.



This diagram depicts a typical organization and selected components of its external discourse communities. Each of the major headings has a number of subheadings. For examples, **News Organizations** contain such connections as radio, network and cable television, newspaper, Internet sites, Weblog columns and more. Each of the subheadings has smaller units of interest to the organization. For example **Television Stations** (under the heading of **News Organizations** have managing directors, news directors, reporters, writers, editors.

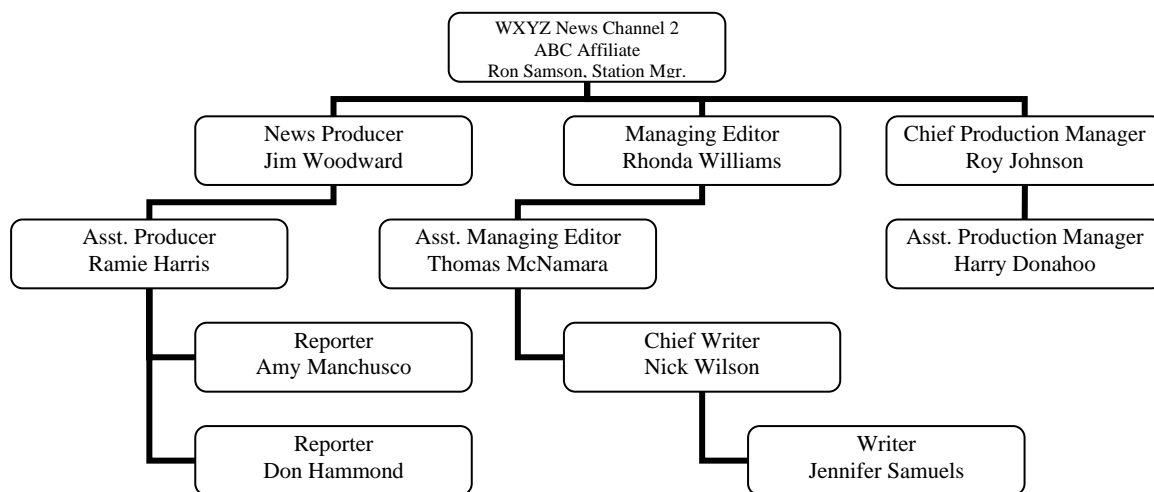
Organizations facilitate information flow to parts of its discourse community that are in some way linked as a stakeholder to that organization. Any one or all of these could be a necessary connection under the media operations heading. Each of these constituencies is unique requiring distinctive messaging. Each has representatives that facilitate information flow between their organization and yours.

Exemplary organizational media operations have several consistent elements including good writers, savvy media strategists, detailed oriented staff and a deliberate media plan requiring relationship building. The chief communications officer is normally the official vital to success in managing a complex set media of responsibilities.

One of the most productive means of establishing an effective media plan that would withstand the ordeal of crisis is the examination of **crisis impact value** in various relationships in the media operations. This examination would assess existing relationships and correlate specific messaging opportunities with representatives of various organizations. Once completed, value would be placed on each relationship

in assessing value. Strategic media plans would follow for each relationship with variations for crisis and non-crisis times.

Essentially, the model would be a pert chart for relationship building and targeted messaging. Static members of the discourse community would build equity. In other words, staff of the home organization would understand and benefit from long standing relationships and knowledge of a discourse community organization. As people and organizations in external discourse communities change, they would be added to the “pert chart” prompting new strategy and renewed efforts in both relationship building and strategic messaging. The analysis chart is as follows; strategy documents are on the pages following. Detailed strategy is presented only for a few of the individuals noted on the chart.



The following is a model for any media operation that might easily be transformed or refined into a crisis media plan. What I mean by this is that in having

this information on file, it is clear there has been some type of relationship established with key stakeholders in the media. These relationships may be examined as a means of increasing messaging or development of relationships, but they also may be included in crisis development plans. When the reporter from a media outlet calls about a pressing issue, the organization knows basically how that reporter will act and report. Further, having that prior relationship is extremely beneficial if the organization needs to communicate a message to stakeholders through the media outlet, and there he (the reporter) is a known quantity in understanding how his news organization might convey information to the public.

I have provided some detail in the first topic of “news organizations,” however; each succeeding group would be treated the same way. By examining the discourse community in this systematic way, organizations can refine messaging in specific areas of communication, and more effectively implement strategies targeted at all of their important stakeholders.

## **Strategic Media Plan XYZ Corporation**

### **News organizations**

#### Television

WXYZ, ABC affiliate, channel 2  
Ron Samson, Station Manager  
Contact information: rsansom@wcet.net,  
404 658-2909, 2308 Peachtree St/ Ste 402, Atlanta, GA 30030  
Wife: Helen, 2 children, ages 5, 12

#### Detailed profile

Inaccessible in office, attends Rotary Club, member of Downtown Golf Club, Vice Pres. of Atlanta Press Club. The few times we have talked with him about media attention, he has referred us to his

reporters. However; Manghum is the key decisionmaker concerning on the air topics and should be nurtured.

Relationship with organization: History of interview events is limited, however; on several occasions; Manghum has followed up with reporter interviews on questions concerning aspects of interviews. Discussions during these interviews have been noted in the final news program copy and they have been accurate and unbiased. Therefore, he definitely can influence policy and he seems to be a straight shooter. He does not seem to take unjustified positions without justification.

Profile updated, 4/3/05

Strategy:

Letters of follow-up on work of reporters

[Example]

Mr. Ronald Ransom, Station Manager  
WXYM Channel 2  
2308 Peachtree St/ Ste 402  
Atlanta, GA 30030

Dear Ron:

Please accept this letter of appreciation for the recent work of reporter Jim Union concerning the charitable work of our organization. It is always of great benefit for us to be recognized in the media for our backing of Atlanta charities, and we especially appreciate your continuing support of our work.

Jim is a professional and seems genuinely concerned with columns reflecting the great heart of this city. We have truly enjoyed working with him.

Again, thank you for this important visibility, and for your continuing friendship.

Kindest regards,

Jim Johnson, SVP/External Affairs

Next Actions:

Invitation to play National Press Club charity golf tournament on May 19  
 Invite to sit at APC annual dinner

Staff liaison: Jim Johnson, VP Ext Aff

Follow-up

May 20, June 16, August 14 letters of thank you for work of reporters Smith  
 and Johnson on their work

Other Stakeholders:

Network channel 5

Network channel 6

Cable channel 32

Cable channel 45

Regulators

Government agencies

Neighborhood groups

Community groups

Political groups

Advocacy groups

Each of these stakeholder groups would have a similar strategy as that of Channel 2, the ABC affiliate. Each would have a profile, including employees, activities, tasks, things to do including copies of correspondence and other written documentation.

In summary of this exercise, it is beneficial to assess relationships with members of the discourse community and to establish strategy for each person or organization. Once the strategy has been developed, then an organization may set priorities for the set of discourse communities based on priorities, potential opportunities or problems, or any criteria the organizations deems important. It is important to note that this is probably a one-time activity for many of the individuals

in the strategy. Updates are necessary only when new individuals come on board or when there is interaction worth noting in the files. When complete, interested individuals within an organization must assess each rung of the discourse community to insure contact and related information is accurate. Then strategies should be devised that attempt to define relationships, refine messaging or in some way meet objectives of the overall crisis communication plan of action.

*Development of a Media Operations Model; Executive Preparation*

As noted in the first portion of this Media Operations Model, analysis of the discourse community is a necessary component of a comprehensive media plan. However; knowing who the stakeholders are, developing profiles of them, keeping track of telephone calls and meetings, and developing relationships with them are not the only aspect of a successful media plan. Key officials in an organization should learn how to interact with journalists and key members of the stakeholder community. When the stakes are high, executives need to understand accepted interview strategies that accomplish certain objectives. These strategies can be learned in a variety of ways (See Chapter II: Part V for additional discussion on hostile media interaction).

Research suggests two essential elements in this training process: 1) an understanding of tactics involved in discussions with the media and other stakeholders; and 2) role play to allow the participant to become comfortable with the process.

Caneva defines media training as “Knowing who your audience is and how best to reach it whether it is to announce a new product, respond in a crisis, or to



provide expert opinion” (40). The training process should include material that helps to accomplish these criteria.

There is ample instructional material guiding executives on how to effectively respond to the media. For example, Friedman suggests that executives clearly understand the behavioral traits of people who successfully respond in interviews. Her objectives in this instruction are, “To identify the traits of those who were most successful. The one common trait among the "successuls" was their verbal fluency. They were confident communicators who could talk to anyone — colleagues, investors, strangers, bosses or associates” (29). Friedman has several key elements in his training: 1) Strive for verbal fluency; 2) Think like a reporter; 3) Humanize the story; and, 4) Know your game [understanding organizational objectives and how to articulate them] (30, 31).

Friedman’s itemizes specific tactics in a successful interview. These include:

- **“Be real.** People want to relate to you. No one wants to hear from a robot who is so "on message" that he never smiles or shows emotion. Enthusiasm is contagious. If you want to engage a reporter, then let your passion pour out.
- **Speak their language.** They know you're smart — that's why they're interviewing you. So avoid big words or workplace jargon. Speak simply and conversationally. If the reporter doesn't understand you, then she can't explain it to the reader.
- **Own your interview.** Interviews are opportunities to share, inform and educate. It's not enough to simply answer the question. Try to address the question and look for opportunities to insert your message.

- **Don't assume the reporter knows what you're talking about.** Most reporters are not experts in your field. They know a little about a lot, not a lot about a little. What is clear to you might sound foreign to them. Make sure they understand what you're talking about. They can't accurately report and make sense of information that they only think they understand.
- **Attitude is everything.** Cooperate. Don't be offensive, argumentative or confrontational. Don't tell the reporters how to do their jobs. You should provide information to guide them, but ultimately they will write the story. Reporters do not work for you.
- **Stay on the yellow brick road.** Don't ramble. Say what you have to say as clearly and concisely as possible, and then stop! It is not your responsibility to fill the silence. Too much information and too many details create confusion, inaccurate reporting and misunderstandings.
- **Avoid either/or questions.** Either you agree or disagree. Which is it? You cannot win an either/or question, which is designed to box you into a limited answer. Take the high road to present a broad picture of the issues involved.
- **Be yourself.** If you don't know something, say so. Reporters will respect your honesty” (31).

Dillon focused his examination on the process of training. Included in his conclusions were suggestions on how to train executives in the fundamentals of media and stakeholder interaction. His eleven point objectives of training included:

1. “Involve the trainees. Use a pre-*training* questionnaire to find out what they know, what they are interested in, and what they hope to get out of the *training*, and then adjust the content accordingly. Don't forget to include Q&A time.
2. Focus on doing. Trainees consistently rate interview simulations as one of the most useful parts of the *training* process. Include simulations for each participant, supported by constructive, specific feedback. If time permits, have trainees develop the messages they will deliver in the simulations.
3. Reinforce your messages. *Media training* is a natural opportunity to introduce or review internal communications guidelines and objectives. Discuss the guidelines at the start of the programme or ask the trainer to incorporate them in to the course materials.
4. Make the experience appropriate. Group trainees according to their seniority, responsibilities and *media* experience, and tailor the course materials and interview simulations accordingly. 60 Minutes-style ambush interviews can be useful, but are inappropriate for most trainees.
5. Keep it inhouse. Private *training* sessions allow you to discuss confidential issues that are (or may soon be) in the headlines. Ensure your trainer has signed a non-disclosure agreement.
6. Stay current and relevant. Every business has its China Aviation Oil, Vioxx or Elliot Spitzer. Your *training* programme will have more credibility if it addresses big issues confronting your industry.

7. Go offsite. Assistants, urgent paperwork, phone calls and email invariably interrupt inhouse sessions.
8. Communicate. Discuss your expectations and preferences with the trainer, and warn them about any company- or participant-specific idiosyncrasies they may encounter. Smart trainers appreciate post-session feedback, too.
9. Hold issue-specific sessions. *Media training* is especially valuable when participants can use new skills in an upcoming news conference or interview. For extra relevance, brainstorm the questions that participants are likely encounter in the interview, and use them in the simulations.
10. Have fun. Facing the *media* can be a daunting experience, so make sure your *training* session includes some lighter moments to relieve the tension.
11. Follow up. Use questionnaires and debriefing sessions to determine which parts of the programme were effective or need improvement. Hold follow-up and refresher courses” (14).

### Role Play

Chen, Frolick, and Muthitacharoen examined the use of role play vis-à-vis IS communications professionals and concluded: “Participants in a role play exercise can gain numerous additional benefits. They are more involved in the training, and this helps to leave a more long lasting effect on the participant’s memory (11).

Participants have been found to have a better overview of problems and foresee what possible solution can be used and why (1). Although role play training emulates real situations for its participants it allows participants to experiment with various

strategies to deal with a problem without the real consequences” (68). Managers Magazine concluded “Adults learn best when they are actively involved in the process--It's important to relate training and the need for training to real-life situations and, if done correctly, role-*play* simulates real life, and rehearsal helps develop both competence and confidence” (29).

Thus, a role play exercise for an executive can prepare him for future encounters with a reporter or stakeholder when both the issues and the consequences are authentic.

Researchers suggest the use of staged interviews between participants in which issues are presented and participants requested to react. In so doing, the participants of the role play, and possibly colleagues may critically examine various responses. Coppellotti concluded, “Using closed circuit television can be an advantage. Delegates can learn a lot from watching their own performance, taking a more objective view of the effect of their body language, tone of voice and eye contact” (47). Specific techniques in role play include the following:

1. “In planning *role-play* sessions, decide what *roles* you are going to perform and then prepare for those *roles*. You should be prepared to *play* several types so that the trainee has an opportunity to handle a wide variety of responses. *Play* the *role* realistically. Don't act like a manager with several years of knowledge and experience in the financial services field.
2. Settle for nothing less than perfection. Until a presentation becomes a habit, it is probably worse than useless. If the trainee attempts to use a presentation

after the initial training and forgets it or stumbles in its delivery, he or she may never use it again because "it didn't work."

3. View mistakes as valuable information. It is better for a trainee to make a mistake in a skill-building session and to learn from it than to make a mistake in front of a client or prospect and lose credibility.
4. Make the trainee work as hard as necessary to ensure that the session is realistic. Come up with the most difficult objections, questions, and inhibitions that you've ever heard raised during similar real-life circumstances.
5. Make very clear what you want and what the trainee should do -- what you are trying to accomplish.
6. Don't allow trainees to slip out of *role* by saying, "Then I'd say. . . ." or by asking innocuous questions to break the pressure. Above all, keep it serious -- don't horse around.
7. Participants learn best when they receive constructive feedback that includes both reinforcement for what they did well and specific details about what they did not do well.
8. Don't interrupt *role-play* to critique performance. This breaks the continuity and takes you further away from the reality you're trying to simulate. Always finish a session before you critique" (29 Section Manager's Handbook).

## Summary

The development of a media operations model is a key component in a crisis management plan. It is also relevant to ongoing operations for a variety of reasons, including:

1. Allows an organization to examine and prioritize external relationships; strategies and tactics as a function of efficient communication;
2. Allows management to understand their personal role in crises and in routine operations from the perspective of stakeholder messaging; and,
3. Prepares management for crisis through literature examination and through role play;

The plans suggested in this part may be implemented in whole or in part. It is reasonable to assume that smaller organizations can simplify many of these strategies into more acceptable plans of discovery, while larger organizations may need to expand them. Such plans are highly customized for the size and type of organization.

## *Chapter Conclusion*

The relationship between an organization and its discourse community is a subject of much discussion in the arenas of public relations, media relations, and marketing. Market segmentation entails the identification of specific individuals and groups within a discourse community to allow an organization to proactively examine those components for communications strategies. By accomplishing this on a routine basis, organizations can more skillfully guide their mission through a morass of

stakeholder opinions, actions, and attitudes. If an organization did not initiate this type of examination, not only would it be missing an opportunity of enhancing or perhaps developing valuable relationships with stakeholders, it would likely continue to be vulnerable in many areas of its operating systems. Research shows that this principle applies to all types of organizations, including corporations, non-profits, and higher educational institutions.

The process of organizational examination and vulnerability analysis applies to both crisis and non-crisis situations. The processes and methodology, while differing in time factors and intensity, are very similar. They both involve environmental scanning, tactical messaging, and development of communication strategies to accomplish the strategies.

In summary, the development of media and crisis contingencies represents short and long term strategies that enable efficient communications to an organization's discourse community. By accomplishing these objectives, an organization can be more efficient in its routine communication objectives and also more efficient when a crisis event is evident.



CHAPTER IV  
THE WEB AS A DELIVERY PLATFORM FOR CRISIS COMMUNICATION

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*Introduction*

Worldwide use of the Internet is expanding at an unrelenting, unstoppable pace in a myriad of types of e-commerce—with the word *e-commerce* stated in the broadest of terms. The fields of health, education, research, transportation, science, publishing, aviation, and business are all immersed in Internet commerce and Internet administration, with constant advances in their operating systems.

Rao, Metts, and Mora Monge offered the figure of \$2.7 trillion in e-commerce (11) in 2004. *Internet Business Advantage* publication reported that in online brokerages, Charles Schwab increased log-in capacity from 10,000 simultaneous users in 1997 to 25,000 in 1998. Schwab's online clientele increased from 700,000 to 1.3 million in a little over a year in 1997-1998, with total online assets of \$91 billion. The second largest online brokerage, E-Trade, posted 225,000 subscribers, with over 4 million transactions in 1997-98 ("Online Computer Sales" 6-9). Kent & Taylor noted that NASA's Web site had 300,000,000 "hits" in a two week period and fifty to sixty-million hits on July 7, 1997 alone, a day after the landing of the Sojourner spacecraft on Mars (325). This event was eight years ago when the Web was just becoming widespread. Usage of the Web is immense and increasing, with continued exponential growth assumed by most experts. *Internet Business Advantage* reported that Dell Computer Corporation currently has online sales exceeding \$3 million per day in 2005 ("Online Computer Sales" 7). These are just snippets of data from a business world clamoring for ways to use the Internet for operations.

The functionality of the Internet has evolved in several directions. Based on my research, I would segment the growth in four broad areas, including e-commerce, education and research, organizational management, and finally, connectivity. We have examined each of these areas in this dissertation. This chapter will continue to bring them into discussion, however; it is the relationship between the Internet and dialogic connectivity that interests me the most as far as crisis management and crisis communication is concerned. As noted earlier, I define dialogic connectivity as the communication that takes place between employees in an organization and stakeholders in the organizational discourse community.

In early descriptions of the Internet, much consideration was given to the anticipated extraordinary flow of data and the potential for research. Yet, an important and perhaps unforeseen secondary aspect of the WWW has been the profound influence on relationships. Could it have been anticipated that organizational discourse communities would be opened up via the Internet to anyone with a computer and a modem? Kent, Taylor & White concluded, “Situational theory suggests that external publics exert influence on organizations. These stakeholders have specific information needs and enact specific communication behaviors. Stakeholder theory explains how individuals recognize, define and resolve problems and it can be easily applied to Internet mediated organization-public relationships” (66). In other words, the Internet is the ultimate matchmaker (of the organizational variety)—it has the ability to bring together an organization and individuals and groups comprising the stakeholders.

Kent, Taylor & White also posed an interesting question concerning organizational Websites. “Are organizations creating Web sites that allow for interactivity with stakeholders? Or, or organizations merely creating a Web presence to keep up with their competition?” (67). They concluded, “The Web provides public relations practitioners an opportunity to create dynamic and lasting relationships with publics, however; to do so requires that dialogic loops be incorporated into Webpages and Webbed communication” (Kent, Taylor & White 325, 326).

A broader way of looking at the issue of relationships via the Web involves the type and mission of the organization. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, research shows that corporations tend to correlate business strategies to profit motivation. Tactics such as crisis management and strategic communication development tend to fall under the radar screen. While this may be changing, unless we are talking about a very progressive and innovative organization, development of the Web for advanced communication strategies falls well short of Web strategies for sales and marketing. If a profit incentive is not directly and clearly perceived, then most companies spend their resources elsewhere.

Studies have also found that non-profits and educational organizations, while making steady improvement, are not maximizing their potential for information dissemination and interconnectivity through the use of the Web. Hopkins, cited in Chapter II, Part VII, discussed perceived weaknesses in NPO Internet strategies, however also noted extraordinary potential for fundraising (Money 07b). Kang and Norton, in an empirical study, concluded, “Aside from conventional wisdom, higher income selected NPO’s (non-profits) are not fully achieving the public relations goal

of creating a dialogic loop with publics for thorough understanding, thus limiting their future resources. Furthermore, financially limited NPOs can utilize the Web as an effective outlet to fulfill their organizational goals. For a smaller expense compared to offline public relations activities, financially limited NPOs can easily reach out to various publics on the Web through online shopping or discussion opportunities” (283). While they did not specifically explore the complexities of crisis management in non-profits in relation to Web use, other scholars noted in this dissertation have concluded that many of the routine tactical applications of the Web are important tools during crisis.

If we assume, based on substantial research already discussed in this dissertation, that stakeholder relationships positively influence crisis management, then we can also deduce that the Web is an extremely useful tool in helping to manage for crisis. DiNardo wrote, “Public relations practitioners need to build Internet usage into a comprehensive strategic plan to provide the public with access to information...with the Web becoming an important medium to reach stakeholders” (369). While DiNardo found empirical evidence that most businesses are not now employing the Web for interconnectivity to stakeholders and stakeholder organizations, she concluded that the opportunities are substantial for advancement in this area of tactical public relations and crisis management. Her conclusions also correlate the use of the Web for crisis situations with similar findings. In her examination, she found that most organizations using the Web for crisis management did so for information distribution and not for interconnectivity. In so doing, she

concluded that businesses were missing an excellent strategic opportunity to increase organizational efficiency during crisis.

I want to make a distinction between DiNardo's use of the terms *information distribution* and *connectivity*, because it is an important element in the issues in this chapter. In essence, the difference has to do with a tactical objective of either sending out gathered facts for the sake of informing, or do so for the purpose of relationship-building. Is information distribution an aspect of connectivity? Yes. Is knowledge built through information distribution? Yes. Stakeholders are indeed informed on issues, and become knowledgeable when organizations send information to them via the Web. Stakeholders may even gravitate in one direction or the next through information disseminated to them by an organization. Behavioral modification indeed is a primary function of advertising and other forms of information dissemination.

*Connectivity*, in DiNardo's conceptualization, is not simply the transfer of information for the purpose of behavioral modification. In this definition, she is discussing a tactic of relationship-building that begins with a strategy and continues over time with targeted messaging. The objective of information dissemination is to inform. The objective of connectivity is a relationship.

#### *Tactical Use of the Web during Crisis*

The Web is an effective and successful platform for tactics involving many aspects of organizational communication during periods of crisis, and in managing crisis strategies during routine times. It is used as both an internal and external

medium for messaging. As an internal platform, perhaps on an organization's Intranet, through emailing or through use of the home Web page, the Internet offers an excellent platform for informing staff of ongoing crisis events and activities, and for performing a host of crisis management activities. The Web is also an outstanding platform for interaction with external stakeholders and the media.

Specific administrative tools include:

1. Management during crisis. The Internet allows an administrator to bring together information from numerous locations in the organization, thus allowing for collaborative opportunities. This type of work fosters a sense of unity within the organization and assists in creating a healthy internal discourse community. Thus, by using Internet or Intranet platforms, management can message to internal audiences, receive prompt responses and can keep track of operations all from his desktop.
2. Targeted narrative. The Internet allows the organization to tell its own story using a variety of rhetorical techniques, without having to worry with dissenters. In fact, the storyline can include antagonistic viewpoints, thus allowing for the opportunity to refute them in the context of the Web content.
3. Media. The Web offers an access port for distribution of media copy for use by journalists. Typically, reporters have deadlines and must investigate a variety of sources to write their stories. If an organization tells its own story on the Web, allowing reporters to use

the material, it becomes much easier to report the story. Reporters can simply copy the text online and use it for their stories. Not only is the organization explaining its perspective on the Web, it is prompting use of the copy by the media.

4. Facilitation of information: The Internet promotes ease of moving biographical information, media releases, position statements and organization information to the media and to stakeholders.
5. Messaging to public: The Internet provides a platform for public access, allowing a managed flow of information to and from interested parties;
6. Messaging to stakeholders: The Internet provides an excellent messaging capability to stakeholders, including employees and management?
7. Communication with government: The Internet allows communication with regulatory officials and consultants: “Experts” in the company or organization and on the outside could have a special link to discuss the situation; either accessible or inaccessible by the media depending on decisions of the crisis management team.
8. Internal coordination: In creating a Website for crisis events, organizations can take pressure off of staff having to spend time explaining the crisis to internal and external audiences. The advantage of this is not only the fact that employees can simply refer the media and other stakeholders to the site instead of having to address issues by

themselves, it allows management to define the issue, rather than an interpretation of the issue by staff. And, finally it enables management to statistically monitor calls and Website hits to determine progress in moving the acute crisis to a crisis resolution stage. Staff would keep track of the number of calls that are referred to the Website, and then track the subsequent hits.

Businesses, non-profits and higher educational institutions devote attention, effort and financial resources to their Websites. Websites are increasingly becoming a comprehensive mechanism, engaging disciplines of marketing, sales, public relations, information, training and education—each targeting mainstream it's own particular niche project work. Internet operations are now expanding as employees, customers, students and citizens embrace the convenience, ease and value offered through the Web medium.

Walther found, "Computermediated communication (CMC) traversing these networks offers communities in which to take part, educational opportunities to join, information to glean, expertise on which to draw, coordination never before possible with such little expense, and new challenges to the way we manage our interpersonal and professional relationships" (342). Walther's empirical studies examined the use of the Internet in developing relationships, finding that in most circumstances CMC is an effective tool for relationship building, diversity enhancement and international communication. Of fundamental value is that when an organization offers a virtual handshake with stakeholders and the public, there is often a sense of collaboration



and involvement that would heretofore been available only through personal experience. If an organization can create a Website and allow stakeholders to participate in only a small way, then some level of success has been achieved. Dedicated tactics and strategies for engaging niche audiences such as the media, advocacy groups, regulators, or various buying markets through the Web can play a substantial role in meeting crisis management objectives.

Even many progressive institutions withhold judgment over and participation in innovative uses of the Web that are sure to be part of our existence in the future. Perhaps it is a natural defiance to new ideas; perhaps it is as many executives might state—if it costs money and does not have a direct and perceivable bearing on the bottom line, it is not worth doing. We sometimes need to perceive a little harder.

Perry, Taylor and Doerful, in a recent empirical examination of the use of the Internet in crisis situations, found that they had few collections of literature in this narrow and new subject matter upon which to compare their findings.

“Unfortunately, little evidence exists about the use of CMC [computer-mediated communication] in preparing for and managing crisis” (208). However; they concluded that use of the Internet as a crisis delivery platform is valuable. “The Internet is useful for crisis management in two ways. First, it can help organizations conduct environmental scanning to prepare for crisis. Through the Internet and the World Wide Web (WWW), organizations can search through enormous amounts of information and create effective issues management strategies to detect problems before they become crises (Ramsey, 1993; Thorsen, 1995). Second, computer-mediated communication can help organizations communicate decisions quickly

during a crisis to stakeholders and generate feedback from the public. The Internet, then, offers organizations one more resource through which they can influence their environments” (206, 207).

They also concluded, “The Internet can also serve as a strategic and tactical communication tool that organizations can use during a crisis. Many communication managers may be reluctant to create additional risk by communicating via the Internet during a crisis. However; Edelman (1998) asserted that technology has created a "new generation of crisis response" where the immediacy of the news allows for "no grace period designated as 'response time' in a crisis situation” (210).

Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer concluded that the handling of crises is often judged by internal and external audiences that assess the legitimacy of an organization. While this assuredly has to do with prior relationships and reputational dynamics, these authors wrote, “Organizations are considered legitimate when they establish congruence between the social values associated with or implied by their activities and the norms of acceptable behavior in the larger social system of which they are a part” (66). This is a somewhat abstract way of saying that stakeholder opinions on the way an organization handles a crisis if they perceive a familial spirit with those involved. In crisis planning and management therefore, a primary obligation of an organization is to insure that people know you and feel good about you, yet another example of a fundamental rhetorical theme involved in crisis management.

Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer reasoned that the best way to accomplish these objectives is to use the methodology of “environmental scanning” both internal to

external and external to internal. “Environmental scanning is essential for organizations to establish and maintain this consistency and legitimacy...including routine means by which organizations monitor their environment: (1) sense making, (2) issue management, (3) boundary spanning, and (4) risk communication” (67).

The authors further examined various types of messaging in a crisis, and found that there are communication similarities in all crises. The following table illustrates their conclusions:

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“Functions of communication in organizational crisis

1. Environmental scanning (monitoring and maintaining external relationships)
  - a. Sense making
  - b. Boundary spanning
  - c. Issue management
  - d. Risk communication
2. Crisis response (planning for and managing crises)
  - a. Uncertainty reduction
  - b. Coordination
  - c. Information dissemination
  - d. Strategic ambiguity
3. Crisis resolution (restructuring or maintaining relationships after crisis)
  - a. Defensive
  - b. Apology
  - c. Explanative
  - d. Renewal
  - e. Grieving/memorializing
4. Organizational learning (emerging from a crisis with an enhanced knowledge base)
  - a. Dialogue
  - b. Epistemology
  - c. Hierarchies” (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer 66, 67)

Crisis messaging, by its very nature, involves more controlled declarations than at other times. Properly staged, it handles a very tightly driven set of

management objectives. However; crisis communication objectives are best performed *as part of an ongoing communications strategy*, and not just a response to a particular incident. The Web offers an excellent and perhaps the only available medium for accomplishing this strategy.

It is acceptable for communication offices and officers to use the Web for topical information and response. However; it is more valuable if crisis information and messaging is contextual over a period of time and in conjunction with the larger objectives of the organization. It is as if the crisis event were a fragment of a communication plan taking place on a long stretch of informative messages. Reporters, employees, stakeholders, antagonists, and the public might utilize specific and targeted communication during crisis to satisfy immediate needs, however; longer term goals would be achieved if the messages were part of an organization's guiding communication principles and their comprehensive place in the community.

"Tell it as best you can, tell it fast and tell the truth" is a journalistic objective in responding to crisis issues from a possibly hostile press. Use of the Web allows you to accomplish these objectives as both a primary and secondary means of messaging (*primary* being a face-to-face or telephone interview). Using the Web, the facts can be related more concisely and misquotes are not an issue since the copy is there for the taking. One side note in crisis journalism is the propensity of reporters to "misquote" or adapt copy to fit their reporting objective or even to invent copy with there is none. With the creation and frequent updating of a crisis Website, a reporter (or the public) is able to keep abreast of the status of the event, and to use the copy as needed. In crisis reporting, plagiarism is a good thing.

Several years ago, I conducted a descriptive survey of about one hundred executives using a sampling of media, corporate and educational institution respondents (Harrison 2003). The objective of the survey was to examine the existence of crisis communication Websites and to understand if reporters would use such a site if available. One large company in Atlanta responded to the survey, *“We have the ability to activate a “crisis-related” page at any time that would carry this sort of information.”* Their objective was reactive and not strategic.

All respondents indicated they would consider use of the Web for crisis information, and all thought that the media would favorably respond. *“They [the media] apparently like it. It must be timely, and we make sure it is. Press conferences or statements are posted verbatim within an hour or so of their occurrence. It is the first place press releases are posted. It carries a complete calendar of daily events, speaker schedules, etc.”* Having said this, it is surprising that many organizations are not turning more to the Web for posting crisis information. Reading through dozens of Websites of companies and experts advertising their services in crisis media communication reveals little information, advice or expertise on Web-driven crisis communication. Perhaps these authors and consultants are reacting to historical perspectives on news coverage that has always worked for them. As stated by a newspaper reporter responding to my survey, *“The tendency will always be to prefer direct conversation, but it’s often in the best interests of the source to have a brief written statement prepared – not all the time, but in the case of stories where it’s very important what the initial response is.”*

Aside from the consideration that journalists tend to maintain conservative standards of information processing—that is they like conduct interviews—there appears to be few reasons why the use of the Web has not been embraced by all sides in the area of crisis communication. It not only allows a company to tell the entire story efficiently and effectively, it also enables reporters accomplish their work with relative ease. All they have to do is cut and paste, and for the most part their work is done. A thousand words for a piece on the eleven o'clock news can be as easy as snipping lines of copy off of a well written company Website. However; the grunt work of news and media is the background copy that is written and facilitated around the issue. My experience in using the Web for this type of function is that it is indispensable. It is an extraordinary opportunity for crisis information and likely will grow in stature as a tool for crisis communication.

One reporter in my survey responded: *“The future seems to portend even more blurring of the lines [between traditional means of media delivery and the Web]. A few years down the road, if we continue to have the evolution in personal communications devices we are seeing now, telecommunications, the human voice and the Internet may be integrated so smoothly the distinctions will break down altogether.”*

Coombs concluded, “Intranets are relatively new technology but are custom-made for crises...the beauty of the Intranet is the speed of accessing information...if the crisis team needs financial information, it can retrieve the information on the computer—no need to place a call...information processing is crucial during a crisis...the Intranet is ideal for meeting these needs” (85). Thus, communication and

access to information within an organization is vital for management of crises. Moreover, the same is true for outside the organization. Coombs also concluded that the Internet is an excellent tool for information flow between an organization and government agencies, stakeholders, media groups, advocacy groups, and others. He also concluded that the Webpage is an excellent place for specific crisis information to be delivered to niche audiences (86, 87).

### *Creating a Crisis Website*

A Web page or link on an organization's home page communicating crisis information is technically simple to create. Typically, a crisis link is displayed on an organization's Web page as a means of accomplishing a task—primarily messaging to one or more stakeholders. If placed on the Intranet, the audience is strictly internal. If placed on the Internet, both internal and external strategies can be achieved.

Obviously such a site would not be called or referred to as a “crisis site.” There are many ways of softening the approach, such, “Special Information Site,” etc. An organization may even wish to be more specific: “Special Information Site on the Alvarez Incident,” perhaps in reference to a rape on a college campus.

There are three issues that come to mind in naming a crisis link, including prominence, brevity, and specificity. Perhaps these elements seem to be conflicting, however; many organizations that use homepage crisis links do so effectively accomplishing all three objectives. “About the Alvarez Incident” is a solution; “Kent State's Position on Presidential Salaries” is a solution.

Of the three elements, perhaps brevity is the least important, with prominence and specificity demanding higher priority. A solution to a lengthier crisis site-name

may be a cursor pass-over tag that enhances the name of the link. A link may be titled, “The Alvarez Issue,” with a pass-over tag prompting the box, “This link describes Kent State University’s position on the recent dormitory incident involving a rape victim.”

This solution would work unless there are more than one or two crisis issues going on at once, which is often the case in larger organizations. To be discussed later in this chapter is Microsoft.com, in which their crisis information is often posted under the homepage link called “For Journalists.” This approach probably would be unacceptable for small or medium sized organizations simply because they are not prone to too many journalistic or legalistic issues at one time. “The Warehouse Fire and Retail Store Hours” is acceptable. If there happens to be a need for a site discussing media or legal issues, then a second link within the primary crisis site is appropriate.

It is important that the site be highly visible if the goal is to reach external audiences. Therefore, the link for the site should be on an organization’s home page or at least on the media page. If the crisis communication team or management feels that the issue is vitally important to reach specific targets, then the highest prominence possible should be considered; usually the home page of the organization. Perhaps this may seem reactive rather than preemptive. However; the presence of a link on the home page should not be a reflex action; it should have been a part of a long-standing crisis management plan. It is hopefully merely the entry point to a well conceptualized communication strategy.



The content of the site does not have to be complicated. In fact, if multiple stakeholders and the public are primary targets, the site should be very simple to use and written in language easy to understand. Language describing the site (the primary link) should be descriptive but not alarming. Design criteria include:

- The site should be comprehensive and well-orchestrated. Bits of information are confusing. Simplicity is desired. The site should not attempt to impress the user, but to provide accurate and practical information.
- The language and design should be understated, and in keeping with the design themes of the host site. No red background indicating crisis, no bold fonts, no demonstrative language on the site. Yet, the link should readily draw the user to the crisis site.
- The objective is to present a caring persona (pathos) and accurate, reliable, and timely information.

Links and information on this Website should include the following:

1. A title for the special Website, for example:
  - a. Special Website on Recent Events involving University of Kansas Dormitory Violence;
  - b. Product Recall Information on Tyco's Backseat Baby Restrainer;
  - c. Public Information on Salary Issues Involving Red Cross Director Jim Haney;
  - d. Recent Violence at the Paces Ferry Health Center.

2. History and timeline of the issue;
3. A clear definition of the issue or conflict;
4. Links to letters or presentations from company officials discussing the conflict;
5. Links to external sources supporting the claims of the organization;
6. Presentation of conflicting views as long as they are thoughtful analysis of the situation—it may be appropriate to offer an online forum to allow the expression of concerns. An equally thoughtful and non-provocative response to conflicting views is appropriate;
7. Presentation of scientific or technical positions is appropriate in supporting organizational views if the material is presented in plain language and is made by authorities on the subject—highly technical information or that presented in jargon hurts the case.
8. Organizational information—bios of officials in the organization; a listing of products and services; charitable or humanitarian involvement of the organization; community ties;
9. Statements by officials concerning the conflict; these may be especially produced for this site, or it may be recent press statements released during the course of the conflict;
10. Recent press releases on the issue at hand or similar issues;
11. Relevant charitable or humanitarian considerations with the organization—hopefully relevant to the topic—this type of information

balances the bad news with the good news and is often integrated into a crisis site;

12. Message boards allowing interactivity between organization and public/stakeholder;
13. Frequently asked questions (FAQ)—this might be placed in a conspicuous place on the Website perhaps as the first document opened, and might provide all the information and internal/external links needed by a user;
14. Maybe a site map, if the home site is large and there are a number of links to access.

The intent of the Website is to diffuse the crisis by providing a comprehensive examination of the situation for all stakeholders and the public. If the situation is well known in the public's eyes, many people will be searching the Website to see what the organization says in its defense. A special Website is an excellent way of presenting your side of the equation. Likewise, it allows the internal community including staff, families, consultants, etc. to understand the perspective of the organization and to ascertain real time information to satisfy their own needs.

### *Website Examples*

Five examples of successful Websites are offered that involved crisis components or crisis content. These include:

- The Georgia House of Representatives executive staff posted links on its homepage in response to accusations by a political leader.

- Kennesaw State University media relations team developed a Website in response to international media attention concerning a course in which pro-Nazi material was allegedly presented to students.
- The Microsoft site moves toward a more consistent and integrated approach to crisis management. The elements of response in the Web site are embedded, and part of a continuum of corporate communication. While the elements are definitely “reacting” to external stimuli, theirs is a very conservative and comprehensive approach to crisis management.
- The Odwalla Juice Company site, while no longer available, has been well cited as one of the first examples of crisis Web sites that provided vital information to the public on urgent product recalls and disposal of the product if already purchased. In this crisis, the President discarded the legal team’s advice and became a spokesperson for the company, accepting full responsibility and the mantra—“This is our fault and we want to protect the public at all costs.”
- The Shell Oil site is probably the most astute and intuitive of the five Websites presented in this chapter. While the objective of the site was to respond to the execution of poet Ken Saro-Wiwa, Shell seized the opportunity to mourn Saro-Wiwa’s death and also to emphasize a long term investment relationship with the Ogoni nation and people. Again, this was clearly a reactive crisis Website, however; was created in such as way as to diffuse all but the most ardent antagonists.

*Georgia House of Representatives Link (Website no longer available)*

Like all political organizations, the Georgia General Assembly is a partisan body that struggles in almost every decision it makes. As in many states, the political makeup of the Legislature in Georgia is very tight—that is, each of the parties has about the same number of members (which is similar to the state as a whole). Therefore, most issues are acrimonious, and few decisions are made without much debate and rancor.

In 2004, when the Governor of the State accused House of Representative leaders of cutting the budget allocation for K-12 education, the House leader's office was overwhelmed with telephone calls from thousands of teachers in the state. For several days, administrators were forced to move staff from other locations into the Speaker's phone banks to respond to charges leveled by the Governor. Unfortunately, staff members answering the telephones were not well trained in dealing with irate callers and, in many ways were making the crisis even worse. The solution was to create a link on the home page of the House Website presenting a thoughtful response to the very tense political situation. The bright red colored link, prominently displayed in the middle of the page announced, "Speaker's Response to Governor's Statement on Education Budget Cuts." There could be no mistake as to the subject matter of the link.

Staff members answering the telephone banks no longer tried to explain the political nuances of the situation or try and calm down the teachers who called. Instead, the callers were directed to the special link. They were told that the information on the Website completely explained the budget situation, and that if the

caller was still upset, to call the office back. Within 24 hours of the implementation of the link, the media picked up on the story and word quickly spread around the state to the irate teachers. The Website started picking up hits from almost all of the 169 counties in the state. The rate of incoming telephone calls began slowing down. Within 48 hours, the crisis was diffused. Our IT department informed us that over 12,000 hits were made on the site in that 48 hour period.

The letter carefully laid out the budget process showing where and how the House leadership added funds to the education budget instead of reducing them. Links were provided in the letter to the Legislative Budget Office and the Governor's own budget office, showing budgetary line items supporting the statements by the House leaders. I am using this successful example of a Website response because it was a simple solution to a very big problem for the Speaker's office in the Georgia Legislature. The link accomplished three things.

- First, it brought together the leadership of the House of Representatives toward a collaborative response. In a political body, this is sometimes a difficult task. Not only do political struggles exist between the House and the Senate; between the Governor and the Legislature; and, between the Democrats and Republican, there are also conflicts between various factions of the respective party organizations. They certainly do not always agree with their own party members. When the teachers began calling into the offices in the House of Representatives, there were many discussions internally in each of the political parties on the proper direction. When the Website

response was proposed, it allowed the leadership of the House to collaborate on the substance and direction of the letter.

- Second, the Website link had the physical influence of almost immediately diffusing the crisis. It gave the teachers a place to vent their frustrations and to realize that inaccurate information had been previously given to them. The data in the letter was irrefutable, with appropriate links to independent staff that were fully informed on the subject of the teacher raises and prepared to respond to questions if necessary. Therefore, it was immediately evident that the leadership of the House of Representatives represented the solution to their problems and not the impediment.
- Third, the link on the House Website was physically a very simple matter to produce. While the content of the letter took some wrangling among House members, the link went up in less than a day. It was a near perfect, timely solution to a crisis situation.

A prominent link on the home page of an organization explaining a situation is an excellent method of bringing solution to many crisis situations. It allows management to tell an unfiltered story, with the idea of informing stakeholders, the public, and the media. Additionally, if the crisis has become a media story, it allows the organization to regularly update information for use by journalists, with the idea that the reporters can cut and paste copy into their columns.

*KSU German/Nazi Crisis (Website no longer available)*

In 2002, a professor of foreign language at Kennesaw State University devoted a small section of her German class to discussion of expansions in certain areas of the economic condition in Germany in the 1940's. A few students in the class took offense at the presentation, asserting that the professor was presenting a case favorable to the Nazi's and the Hitler regime. Within a day or two, the story was posted in a local newspaper, later to be picked up by the Associated Press and sent worldwide. A crisis was born.

According to the definition of a number of scholars, the crisis event was the reporting of the classroom issues. The crisis was the window of opportunity following the initial media reports.

In the days following the initial media reports of the course, public attention to the issue was very demanding. The media division of KSU received requests for information from reporters locally, across the state, nation and around the world. Newspapers in London ran a story on the issue as part of its nightly news. Across Europe and America, print and television media were taking the professor and KSU to task.

It is noteworthy that this crisis fell on the heels of long-term legal battles and internal acrimony at Kennesaw State University, as discussed in other parts of this dissertation. Members of the administration were veterans of litigation from faculty involving religious-bias, gender-bias and other diversity-related issues. These legal battles often consumed the discourse community at KSU inflaming staff and stakeholders. Such hostility tended to keep the media aroused.



Journalists seemed to sense major problems at the institution, and often were spirited in looking for fault. Thus, when an issue arose like the German course, the media was ready to exploit the issue and stakeholders, already simmering over previous issues, were quick to publicly vent their frustration. I have discussed issues involving “ineffective prior reputations,” “image repair discourse,” and “discourse community disconnectivity” in other parts of this dissertation. Suffice it to say that with a lack of substantive leadership, a number of internal discourse community problems, and a history of diversity-type issues especially rooted in questions of anti-Semitism, allegations of this supposedly pro-Nazi course were easy for the media to accept. It is this history that brings about a *perfect storm* in the world of crisis management. Organizations with this type of history operate constantly with the fuse lit on a very large powder keg.

In fact, the material presented by the Professor simply referenced economic expansion during that period, apparently without suggestion of any relationship to the Nazi regime. One of the special problems in this issue involved lack of knowledge by KSU employees (about 1,200) during the crisis. Some faculty and staff were contacted by the media concerning their opinions of the German course, and without ongoing factual information, their testimonies were damaging. The *warrior mentality* of academic employees was increasing, as was the bravado. Warrior mentality refers to an employee’s willingness to express to the media his personal opinion on a crisis even when that opinion may fall outside of established parameters of the organization and may be inflammatory to the crisis.

One of the eccentricities of academia is the attention to consensus that accompanies decisionmaking. In a corporate organization, a CEO would simply direct employees to avoid the media with the threat of their jobs as assurance the policy would be upheld. In academia, consensus is often a requirement for decisionmaking. As part of this dissertation, I make note of a situation at the University of Maryland in which slow decisions, primarily caused by the legal affairs office at the institution, followed the death of a basketball player. Later analysis indicated that the decisionmaking procedure was a prominent setback throughout the crisis (Chapter II, Part IV).

In a similar situation at KSU, administrators spent several days bringing together division heads, deans, faculty leaders and campus Jewish leaders to write copy for the Website. The discussions were extremely divisive and difficult. At heart of the matter were the academic rights of freedom of speech—that is, tenured professors who believed they could say whatever they wanted and to whom, including the media. In the case of KSU, there existed an almost universally-held intolerant view of almost anything the long-tenured president wanted. She was powerless to influence the faculty and staff wanting to remove her from office, and they publicly vented their frustrations through the media. What was at play here was not only a sense of frustration on their part with what they were reading in the media, but also a political stance that the President was not effectively leading the organization. In effect, faculty members used this crisis as a means of attempting to achieve campus political objectives.

Had the media office been able to immediately respond to the press, the situation would likely have been quickly resolved. That consensus had to be reached by order of the President, the process was lengthy and acrimonious, and in some ways encouraging of warrior mentality.

With this as a backdrop, staff set about to create a crisis Website with the underlying principles that 1) reputations of all faculty, staff and students—not just the professor—were threatened by the assertions of the media; 2) continued presence of the media on the issue would hurt the University's ability to enroll students, attract quality faculty and to continue fundraising campaigns; and, 3) vigorously refuting the charges was simply the right thing to do—no one wished to be party to any issue or program sympathetic with the Nazi regime.

The Website language was finally worked out as student and outsider demonstrations began to occur on campus. As the chief communication officer, I sent a letter to campus discussing the situation and *requesting* staff and faculty to refrain from talking to the media. Quotes from all sides of the equation were highlighted in the Website, with a thoughtful response put in place when appropriate. A timeline was established that included past diversity issues. All calls across campus were referred to the site.

During the period prior to the Website, the communications office was receiving dozens of calls each day. In the days following the crisis site, the calls diminished in number and intensity. Within a week, the media was no longer interested. The IT office left the special site on the home page for 30 days, and then took it off.

One of the most important documents on the site was a letter drafted for the President's signature that apologized to the students, faculty and public for the misunderstanding of the German course, the frenzy that followed, and the delay in getting information out. This language on the Website served to resolve many hurt feelings on campus, and helped to take away the resolve in the media.

Should there have been an apology from the President? It is an often discussed issue in crisis management. On the one hand, in the eyes of the attorneys, apology is equivalent to culpability. On the other, such a crisis involved hurt feelings, reputations, and longstanding relationships with stakeholders. While Presidents should always listen to legal advisors, the overwhelming evidence is that universities (and organizations) should take control of an issue quickly while advancing the best interests of the institution. Part of this has to do with prior stakeholder and media relationships, and a healthy discourse community.

In the case of KSU, neither was good. However; in the absence of this, the use of a special Website quickly addressed the problems and diffused the media issues. What worked well was the ability to (finally) tell the KSU story in a way that stakeholders and the public understood. By providing accountability in print and on the Web, journalists from the local and state community, and from around the world were able to use our material in writing copy to their readers.

*Microsoft Corporation Website (Microsoft.com)* (Note: Microsoft is a registered trademark)

Author's note: The following discussion involves Website examples and analysis of the Microsoft.com home page, various Microsoft crisis pages, and excerpts from selected Web pages involving news, media, and other topics. These excerpts are meant to be exact duplications of the Webpages, however; some of the graphical user interface processes were not capable of being replicated as part of this dissertation. Any deviation from the Microsoft site is unintentional.


Microsoft's online approach to crisis management can be characterized as contextual and comprehensive. It is *contextual* in that non-routine events, crises and legal issues are placed in context with other online elements (sales, marketing, corporate affairs, media, etc.). A crisis link is simply one of many on the home page.

The Microsoft site is *comprehensive* inasmuch as crisis issues are described in detail for every level of user, from the customer with very limited information about the multitude of products to the advanced IT professional.

Even when there are immediate and pressing issues of public interest, such as a "worm" attack global in perspective, Microsoft's even-handed approach belies the depth of the crisis situation. Instead, Microsoft maintains perspective and typically does not raise the stature of non-routine events to high-pitched crisis levels that might be expected under such circumstances.

For example, in August, 2005, the "Zotob A" Worm attacked Windows 2000 operating systems—mostly government agencies and business organizations. While the situation was well publicized in media throughout the United States, Microsoft's attention to this on their home page was judicious, as follows:

Figure 1

<p>Windows Office Windows Server System Developer Tools Business Solutions Games &amp; Xbox MSN Windows Mobile All Products</p> <p><b>Product Resources</b></p> <p>Downloads Microsoft Update Office Update Security Communities Support Learning Tools Events &amp; Webcasts</p> <p><b>Microsoft Worldwide</b></p> <p>Countries &amp; Regions</p> <div><p><b>Protect your PC in 3 steps</b></p><p>Follow the steps online— or print them for easy reference.</p></div>	<p><b>News</b> <a href="#">What You Need to Know About the Zotob Worm</a></p>
--	---

Note in the center portion of the home page, the box and link:



This is the crisis Website for the Zotob A Worm attack. The link takes the user to a full description of the issues. The text and links read as follows (from Microsoft Website:

Figure 2

### **Malicious Software Removal Tool**

Published: January 11, 2005 | Updated: August 9, 2005

#### **Skip the details and run the tool**

The Microsoft Windows Malicious Software Removal Tool checks computers running Windows XP, Windows 2000, and Windows Server 2003 for infections by specific, prevalent malicious software—including Blaster, Sasser, and Mydoom—and helps remove any infection found. When the detection and removal process is complete, the tool displays a report describing the outcome, including which, if any, malicious software was detected and removed.

Microsoft releases an updated version of this tool on the second Tuesday of each month, and as needed to respond to security incidents. You can run the tool from this Web page anytime or download it to your computer.

**Windows Update** delivers versions for Windows XP and Windows Server 2003 SP1.

**Microsoft Update** delivers versions for Windows XP, Windows 2000, and Windows Server 2003.

**Microsoft Download Center** has versions for all supported Windows versions.

**Note** The version of the tool delivered by Microsoft Update and Windows Update runs in the background and then reports if an infection is found. If you would like to run this tool more than once a month, use the version on this Web page or install the version that is available in the Download Center.

**Figure 2** Because computers can appear to function normally when infected, (cont'd) Microsoft advises you to run this tool even if your computer seems to be fine. You should also use up-to-date antivirus software to help protect your computer from other malicious software. **Note** You must be logged on to your computer with an account that is part of the Administrators group to run this tool.

Within this site are informational links concerning computer security for the novice, student, professional user, small business owner, and international user.

There is also a historical reference for the Zotob worm (this is the latest variety):

**Figure 3**

### **New Additions**

We have added detection and cleaning capabilities for the following malicious software:

- Zotob.A
- Zotob.B
- Zotob.C
- Zotob.D

Microsoft offers expanded definitions of the Zotob A Worm, programs to assess level of infection and assessment of vulnerability, as follows:

**Figure 4**

### **Malicious Software Encyclopedia: Worm:Win32/Zotob.A**

Published: August 18, 2005

Worm:Win32/Zotob.A is a network worm that exploits the Plug-and-Play vulnerability fixed in Microsoft Security Bulletin MS05-039. The worm targets computers running Microsoft Windows 2000 that do not have MS05-039 installed. The worm can also infect computers running other versions of Windows operating systems if it is delivered through e-mail, instant messaging, or other routes.



Figure 4  
(cont'd)

## Severity



What the levels mean

Figure 5

### *On This Page*

Threat Overview

Aliases (Also Known As)

Related Security Bulletins

Technical Analysis

How to Prevent Infection

How to Tell If Your Computer Is Infected

Each of these represents links to sites with definitions and instructions on usage. A great deal of information is available to both the casual user and the IT professional, as follows:

Figure 6

### *Threat Overview*

<b>Class/type</b>	Worm - Network
<b>Discovered</b>	August 13, 2005
<b>Circulating</b>	Yes
<b>Parent variants</b>	Win32/Zotob

Figure 7

## ***How to Prevent Infection***

Take the following steps to help prevent infection on your system:

- Enable a firewall on your computer.
- Get the latest computer updates.
- Use up-to-date antivirus software.

## ***How to Tell If Your Computer Is Infected***

There are no readily apparent indications that your computer is infected with Worm:Win32/Zotob.A. However; your computer may be infected with Worm:Win32/Zotob.A if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- Presence of <system folder>/botzor.exe
- Presence of value: WINDOWS SYSTEM with data: botzor.exe in the following registry keys:

HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run

HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\RunServices

## ***How to Recover from Infection***

### **Manual Recovery**

To manually recover from infection by Worm:Win32/Zotob.A, follow these steps:

1. Install security update MS05-039.
2. Disconnect from the Internet.
3. End the worm process.
4. Delete the worm files from your computer.
5. Delete the worm registry entries.
6. Clean the system host file.
7. Restart your computer.
8. Take steps to prevent re-infection.

### **Install security update MS05-039**

#### **To install MS05-039 using Windows Update**

1. Go to the Windows Update Web site at [windowsupdate.microsoft.com](http://windowsupdate.microsoft.com).
2. On the Windows Update site, click **Scan for Updates**. Windows Update scans your computer and returns a list of critical updates, including service packs.
3. In the **Pick updates to install** list, click **Critical Updates and Service Packs**. Windows Update creates a list of the updates appropriate for your computer, including MS05-039 if it is not installed. Critical updates are selected for download automatically.
4. Click **Review and install updates**, and then click **Install Now**. You may need to restart your computer after installing the updates.

## Figure 7 (cont'd)

### **Disconnect from the Internet**

To help ensure that your computer is not actively infecting other computers, disconnect it from the Internet before proceeding. Print this Web page or save a copy on your computer; then unplug your network cable and disable your wireless connection. You can reconnect to the Internet after completing these steps.

### **End the worm process**

Ending the worm process will help stop your computer from infecting other computers as well as resolve the crashing, rebooting, and performance degradation issues caused by the worm.

### **To end the worm process**

1. Press CTRL+ALT+DEL once and click **Task Manager**.
2. Click **Processes** and click **Image Name** to sort the running processes by name.
3. Select the process botzor.exe, and click **End Process**.

### **Delete the worm files from your computer**

### **To delete the worm files from your computer**

1. Click **Start**, and click **Run**.
2. In the **Open** field, type the name of the system folder, for example, **C:\Winnt\system32\**
3. Click **OK**.
4. Click **Name** to sort files by name.
5. If botzor.exe is in the list, delete it.
6. On the Desktop, right-click the **Recycle Bin** and click **Empty Recycle Bin**.
7. Click **Yes**.

If deleting the files fails, follow these steps to verify that botzor.exe is not running:

1. Press CTRL+ALT+DEL once and click **Task Manager**.
2. Click **Processes** and click **Image Name** to sort the running processes by name.
3. Confirm that botzor.exe is not in the list.

### **Delete the worm registry entries**

Worm:Win32/Zotob.A creates entries in the Windows registry that attempt to run the worm every time your computer restarts. These entries should be deleted.

### **To delete the worm registry entries**

1. On the **Start** menu, click **Run**.

Figure 7 (cont'd)

2. Type **regedit** and click **OK**.
3. In the left pane, navigate to the key:  
HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run  
In the right pane, right-click the following value, if it exists:

WINDOWS SYSTEM

4. Click **Delete** and click **Yes** to delete the values.
5. Repeat steps 3-4 for  
HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\RunServices.
6. Close Registry Editor.

#### Clean the system host file

The worm makes changes to the system host file to prevent access to certain Web sites.

#### To clean the system host file.

1. On the **Start** menu, click **Run**.
2. Type **notepad.exe** and click **OK**.
3. On the **File** menu, click **Open...**
4. In the **File name** text box, type the name of the Windows directory folder and **\system32\drivers\etc\hosts**, for example,  
**C:\winnt\system32\drivers\etc\hosts**.
5. Search for text that begins with "Botzor2005 Made By..."
6. Select this text and all text that follows. Delete the selected text and save the file.
7. Close Notepad.

#### Restart your computer

#### To restart your computer

1. On the **Start** menu, click **Shut Down**.
2. Select **Restart** from the drop-down list and click **OK**.

#### Take steps to prevent re-infection

Do not reconnect your computer to the Internet until the computer is protected from re-infection. See the "Preventing Infection" section for more information.

### *Transmission Methods*

Method	Description
Exploits Vulnerability	Exploits the Plug-and-Play vulnerability fixed in Microsoft Security Bulletin MS05-039.

### *Payload Information*

Payload type	Trigger	Description
--------------	---------	-------------

Figure 7 (cont'd)

Creates files		Copies itself to <system folder>\botzor.exe.
---------------	--	--

### ***Modified Registry Entries***

Changed registry entries	
<b>Key</b>	HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run
<b>Value name</b>	WINDOWS SYSTEM [String]
<b>Old value</b>	
<b>New value</b>	botzor.exe [String]
Changed registry entries	
<b>Key</b>	HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\RunServices
<b>Value name</b>	WINDOWS SYSTEM [String]
<b>Old value</b>	
<b>New value</b>	botzor.exe [String]

### ***Affected Ports***

Protocol	Port number
TCP	8888
TCP	8080
TCP	445
TCP	33333

This site is comprehensive for the Zotob Worm issue, providing information on security issues, historical notes on worm attacks, solutions to worm infiltration, glossary of terms, security downloads for scanning and solution, and corporate contact information.

This is a typical crisis Website for Microsoft. It is a layered, pyramidal approach to crisis that starts with basic information for the casual user, and becomes more complex as each layer is accessed. By the third or fourth layer, the information is designed for only users with highly technical expertise—written for IT specialists in organizations.

Microsoft's Perspective:

Microsoft's Web crisis communication embodies the principle of placing crisis in perspective to their broader interests. As noted above, when an issue is of immediate interest to the public, there is typically a link, such as the Zotob A Worm crisis. However; if the situation is an ongoing topic that Microsoft wants to move into the public's view, such as various civil and criminal suits against the company or instigated by the company, the crisis is handled in a different manner. Embedded in the home page are issues of concern to them, usually under a heading called "For Journalists." It is a symbolic and unobtrusive way of informing the public, and helping Website users find their way to important and sometimes critical information about issues that are of concern to the company. These may not be crises to the public, but to Microsoft they often represent substantial and financially important issues.

Of special interest is Microsoft's approach to public information. The company clearly attempts in its Website to build relationships through their expression of corporate "Mission and Values," and "Microsoft Corporate Citizenship." Note the Web page links and descriptions below on the Microsoft.com site, under the title **Mission Values:**

Figure 8

Our Mission

At Microsoft, we work to help people and businesses throughout the world realize their full potential.

This is our mission. Everything we do reflects this mission and the values that make it possible.

## Figure 8 (cont'd)

### ***Our Values***

As a company, and as individuals, we value:

- Integrity and honesty.
- Passion for customers, for our partners, and for technology.
- Openness and respectfulness.
- Taking on big challenges and seeing them through.
- Constructive self-criticism, self-improvement, and personal excellence.
- Accountability to customers, shareholders, partners, and employees for commitments, results, and quality.

To find out how we are living our mission and values, explore the About Microsoft Web site.

Contained within these links are a variety of topics on Microsoft's corporate philosophy and citizenship. For example, under the heading "Microsoft Corporate Citizenship are the links, 'Diversity at Microsoft,' 'Community Affairs,' 'Education,' 'Accessibility,' 'Standards of Business Conduct,' and, 'Investor Relations.'"

## Figure 9

"Microsoft is committed to being a responsible industry partner. We work with businesses, communities, and governments to help advance social and economic well-being, and to enable people around the world to realize their full potential. While Microsoft, by many measures, could be considered the world's most successful software company, it is also a local company and a neighbor in every country and community where Microsoft employees live, work, and do business.

### ***Learn More***

#### **2004 Global Corporate Citizenship Report**

This report covers our 2004 fiscal year and discusses our Global Citizenship Initiative and related activities worldwide. It highlights some of our more significant accomplishments from 2004 and outlines our goals for fiscal year 2005. The report is organized following the structure of our citizenship initiative because we want our stakeholders—customers, partners, shareholders, employees, and others interested in our activities—to be able to compare our program goals with our results.

#### **Responsible Business Practices**

At Microsoft, we know that how we conduct ourselves and our business is as important as delivering outstanding products and services. How we work with customers, partners, governments, vendors, and communities worldwide is fundamental to our success as a company.

## Figure 9 (cont'd)

### **Internet Safety and Policy Leadership**

As an industry leader, Microsoft recognizes its responsibility to help make the Internet safer. Our ultimate goal is to help create an environment in which adults, children, and organizations are more secure and can enjoy the full benefits of the Internet.

### **Digital Inclusion and Education**

Microsoft recognizes that for millions of people, the promise of technology is still unrealized. We've therefore made a comprehensive commitment to promote digital inclusion, and to help address inequities in access to technology tools, skills, and innovation.

### **Economic Opportunity**

Microsoft's commitment to corporate citizenship includes helping countries improve their global competitiveness and promote local economic growth and development."

In the context of the site are issues relevant to stakeholders, such as the following Web pages.

## Figure 10

### ***Top Stories***

#### **IT Entrepreneurship 101: Microsoft, National Urban League Provide Minority Students Tools, Incentives to Develop a Web-based Business Idea**

*June 7, 2005*

In its second year, Youth IT Challenge becomes a Microsoft model for forging stronger partnerships with minority organizations.

More...

#### **IT Professionals Find Higher-Impact Role in Driving Business Success With Microsoft Infrastructure Technologies**

*June 6, 2005*

As IT professionals gather for Microsoft's Tech•Ed 2005 conference, a cross section of IT executives discuss how their departments are evolving into more powerful catalysts for business improvement.

More...



## Figure 10 (cont'd)

### **Roundtable Q&A: What Makes a Good IT Architect?**

*June 6, 2005*

Three IT experts who helped craft the new Microsoft Certified Architect credential explain how the IT pro's skill set has evolved from pure technologist into strategic business manager.

More...

### **Q&A: Microsoft Announces New Technologies that Empower IT Professionals by Reducing the Complexity of Software Update Management**

*June 6, 2005*

Gordon Mangione, Corporate Vice President of the Security Business & Technology Unit, discusses how Microsoft's new integrated update-management tools and services are designed to provide simpler, more comprehensive computer and network security for customers.

More...

### **Leaders from Across U.S. Gather for Community Partner Leadership Summit at Microsoft**

*June 3, 2005*

Representatives of groups dedicated to issues of diversity and equality weigh how better to use technology to meet the needs of groups underrepresented in U.S. society.

More...

Microsoft's ongoing "crisis" page presents a variety of topics important to its business and corporate environment. The topics are varied and many, offering a fascinating overview of legal issues within the corporate environment"

## Figure 11

"Microsoft offers analysis of ongoing crisis issues. While these issues may represent enormous financial outcomes for Microsoft, the presentations are factual, brief and offer differing viewpoints. The "Legal Newsroom Archive," emanating from Microsoft's Communication Web Page (3 layers from the homepage), is noted below. It is comprehensive, spanning over 5 years of news releases and litigation against the company and from the company." [Note: I have left intact the hyperlinks for online readers].

Figure 11 (cont'd)

"Legal Newsroom Archive: Antitrust Class Action Lawsuits

Antispam Law Enforcement

Antitrust Case (U.S.): Trial and Appeal

Antitrust Case (U.S.): Settlement Proceedings

Antitrust Case (U.S): Remedies Trial

**Antitrust Class Action Lawsuits**

AOL Time Warner vs. Microsoft

Eolas Technologies

European Commission

Federal Trade Commission/Passport

Japanese Fair Trade Commission

Lindows

RealNetworks Inc. vs. Microsoft

Sun Microsystems Inc. and Microsoft

Other Legal Issues

Following the topics pages are the press release pages, that can be accessed by the media or the public:

Figure 12

**April 2005**

- Press Release: Microsoft and Nebraska Plaintiffs Settle Nebraska Class Action Lawsuit - *April 28, 2005*

**August 2004**

- Press Release: Microsoft and New Mexico Plaintiffs Settle New Mexico Class Action Lawsuit - *August 3, 2004*

**Figure 12 (Cont'd)****July 2004**

- Press Release: Microsoft and Vermont Plaintiffs Settle Vermont Class Action Lawsuit - *July 1, 2004*

**June 2004**

- Press Release: Microsoft and Massachusetts Plaintiffs Settle Massachusetts Class Action Lawsuit - *June 29, 2004*
- Press Release: Microsoft and Arizona Plaintiffs Settle Arizona Class Action Lawsuit - *June 28, 2004*

**April 2004**

- Press Release: Microsoft and Minnesota Plaintiffs Settle Minnesota Class-Action Lawsuit – *April 19, 2004*

**October 2003**

- Press Release: Media Alert: Microsoft to Announce State Class Action Settlements, Provide Update on Legal Settlements - *October 28, 2003*
- Press Release: Microsoft and Kansas Plaintiffs Settle Kansas Class Action Lawsuits - *October 28, 2003*
- Press Release: Microsoft and District of Columbia Plaintiffs Settle District of Columbia Class Action Lawsuits - *October 28, 2003*
- Press Release: Microsoft Announces Additional Class Action Settlements, Continues Progress on Resolving Legal Issues - *October 28, 2003*

**September 2003**

- Press Release: Microsoft, Multi District Litigation Plaintiffs Announce Settlement Agreement in Federal Class Action Antitrust Case - *September 30, 2003*

**May 2003**

- Press Release: Microsoft and Montana Plaintiffs Settle Montana Class Action Lawsuits - *May 5, 2003*

**April 2003**

- Press Release: Microsoft and Florida Plaintiffs Settle Florida Class Action Lawsuits - *April 15, 2003*

Figure 12 (cont'd)

### **January 2003**

Press Release: Microsoft Teleconference Regarding California Class Action Antitrust Settlement - *January 10, 2003*

Press Release: Microsoft and California Plaintiffs Settle California Class Action Lawsuits - *January 10, 2003*

### **January 2002**

Press Release: Microsoft Statement on Court Decision To Not Grant Preliminary Approval of Class Action Settlement - *January 11, 2002*

### **December 2001**

Press Release: Microsoft Appoints Internal Legal Compliance Officers  
*December 13, 2001*

### **November 2001**

Press Release: Microsoft Settles Product Pricing Class Action Lawsuits - *November 20, 2001*

Press Release: Microsoft to Report Charge Related to Settlement of Class Action Lawsuits - *November 20, 2001*

Microsoft's Home Page Website is <http://www.Microsoft.com>. In the lower right corner of the home page is a partition entitled "company information."

Accessing that link provides information on issues of importance to the company and the public, and it also places their concerns within the context of their larger corporate awareness campaigns and strategies.

Figure 13

[Mission & Values](#)  
[Corporate Citizenship](#)  
[Company Information](#)  
[Executives & Directors](#)  
[Innovation](#)  
[For Journalists](#)  
[Legal Information](#)

Accessing the link “Legal Information” takes users to current litigation in which the company is involved.

Figure 14

## ***Legal Newsroom***

### **Case Archives**

Find information about current legal action Microsoft is currently involved in.

- Antispam Law Enforcement
- Antitrust Case (U.S.): Trial and Appeal
- Antitrust Case (U.S.): Settlement Proceedings
- Antitrust Case (U.S.): Remedies Trial
- Antitrust Class Action Lawsuits
- (• AOL Time Warner vs. Microsoft
- Eolas Technologies
- European Commission
- Federal Trade Commission/Passport
- Japanese Fair Trade Commission
- Lindows
- RealNetworks Inc. vs. Microsoft
- Sun Microsystems Inc. and Microsoft
- Other Legal Issues

The information on the legal links is not shoved at the user in a crisis mode. It is placed in context using a series of press releases and useful information to the reader. While these may not be crises in the conventional sense, it is clear these are issues of great importance to Microsoft, and they meet the definitions offered by numerous scholars. They involve situations in which decisions must be made that will substantially influence operations and profits for the company. In reading the

material on the Microsoft Web pages, you can understand that the issues are of consequential financial value to the company; however, they are placed in the context of value to the customer. In so doing, Microsoft is putting their crisis issues in context with their entire organization. It softens the touch to the customer, and clearly (and cleverly) equates Microsoft's success with customers.

In summary, Microsoft's Website accomplishes several objectives of crisis management and crisis communication. 1) it is contextual in that it places a crisis situation in context with the overall corporate operations. This contextuality issue really does not have any thing to do with the size of the organization. Small organizations that incur crisis should act similarly. 2) the various crisis sites in Microsoft's Web presence are intuitive in referencing the issues. Basso, Goldberg, Greenspan, and Weimer discussed the concept of "impressions," concluding that if users were to return to a site, or want to do business with an organization, or be accepting of whatever philosophy was be espoused, that the initial impression was critical. "Judgments of trustworthiness occur as soon as a visitor begins interacting with a site" (137). Microsoft accomplishes this, as noted in this discussion. And 3) the Microsoft Website creates a sense of participation with stakeholders. In this regard, Kent, Taylor, and White acknowledged the complexities of meeting Website objectives through specialized content, "It is still very early in our understanding of the relationship between Web site design and the accomplishment of public relations goals. There appears to be a discrepancy between what practitioners believe their Web sites can accomplish in terms of relationship building and how Web site *design* actually facilitates relationship building" (64). However; they reasoned, "As

suggested by Cozier and Witmer, stakeholder theory suggests that the creation of cohesive (or aware) ‘publics’ is facilitated by organizational communication and through mediated communication channels such as the Web. And as situational theories suggest, publics only become active when they recognize that they are participants in a shared issue and that they have the power to do something about an issue. Organizations that can create identification between themselves and their publics increase the likelihood that publics will turn to that organization (a source with which they identify) for guidance. Thus, from a stakeholder perspective, organizational Web sites are important tools for creating strong, mutually beneficial ties with publics” (7).

These analyses well describe the Microsoft Website. Because their products have become globally known and used, Microsoft’s strategy should be to create a kinship between the organization and its stakeholders so that when a crisis situation is present in the company, the stakeholders accept it as an assault on themselves. It appears they have been successful in so doing.

*Odwalla Juice Company Crisis (Website no longer available)*

Odwalla Juice Company is noted for its responsible handling of an e-coli scare in 1996. Unlike Microsoft, that has a seemingly countless number of industry legal, cultural and social episodes, Odwalla is less contentious in the corporate world. While a relatively large company, its persona is of a family-friendly consumer product oriented organization dedicated to nutritious products (<http://www.Odwalla.com/>). The Website theme is tropical, fun and entertaining.

In 1996 health officials in Washington State discovered several cases of bacterial contamination of Odwalla fruit juice drinks. There was one fatality and 60 illnesses from consumption of the drink. Sales radically declined, with the stock price falling over 30% of its value. Immediately subsequent to the discovery of the contamination, lawsuits from affected consumers began being filed in local courts.

Odwalla's immediate action was to recall all products containing apple or carrot juice, involving over 4,600 retail outlets in 7 states. Chairman and CEO Stephen Williamson formed an internal crisis team to oversee the recall and litigation. The recall effort cost was placed at about \$6.5 million—all accomplished within a period of 2 days.

Subsequent analysis showed that the company effectively managed the crisis by 1) taking immediate action; 2) establishing a high ranking crisis team; 3) accepting full responsibility for the situation; and, 4) establishing a full and immediate recall on all products that might be affected with the bacteria.

Williamson was very effective as a spokesperson, expressing sympathy and regret for all those affected with a commitment that the company would pay medical costs for injury. Williamson's internal management was perceived as exemplary. As part of the crisis team efforts, he tele-conferenced with employees giving them the chance to ask questions and get the latest information. This methodology proved successful in creating an effective communications discourse. Ultimately, Williamson continued the crisis communications practices in his executive routine subsequent to the crisis.



Within months of the outbreak, the company had in place what some experts described as "the most comprehensive quality control and safety system in the fresh juice industry." On December 5, the company brought back its apple juice.

Williamson's explanation of how the company found its way is instructive. "We had no crisis-management procedure in place, so I followed our vision statement and our core values of honesty, integrity, and sustainability. Our number-one concern was for the safety and well-being of people who drink our juices" (Staff Article, 1996 1-5).

The Odwalla Website (no longer available) created for this crisis was one of the first such Websites in existence. It was part of the home page for the company and featured several types of media, including audio, hyperlinks to supporting organizations and a limited video presence. These media links were not necessarily trying to bail Odwalla out of the crisis, rather, they were tied to what the corporate officials thought was their responsibility to inform the public. Matthew Harrington, GM of Edelman Public Relations in San Francisco received telephone calls from the PR staff of Odwalla to help create a Website to deal with the crisis. The concept was to provide a link from Odwalla's homepage to provide information and other health-related Web sites, and "Allow anxious consumers to instantly find the most up-to-date information about the risks of, and treatments for, illnesses caused by E. coli" (2). The PR agency arranged for the Web site to be created and operational by the end of the same day. "By 4 p.m., the copy and cover letter were approved, and by the end of the day, we were ready to roll," stated Harrington (2). Rapaport noted, "The quick timing was critical, as online response to the site showed. Within the first 48

hours, it received more than 20,000 hits; a number of those visitors took advantage of hypertext links to the Centers for Disease Control, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and even a Japanese site that gave treatment information” (2).

Odwalla also put out a series of public service announcements, including the use of their Web site for mass distribution. Examples of the audio links embedded on the Website are as follows:

<http://www.cnn.com/HEALTH/9611/01/e.coli.poisoning/gregg.17.aiff>

Text of audio clip: “We are deeply concerned about the safety and health of anyone who has used our products, and we are cooperating fully with the FDA and all the other related agencies to put the best science at work to see if we can find the cause of that.”

<http://www.cnn.com/HEALTH/9611/01/e.coli.poisoning/kessler.10.aiff>

Text of audio clip: “If you have Odwalla Apple Juice, or any other Odwalla, or any other products that contain Odwalla Apple Juice, then you should discard those products.”

<http://www.cnn.com/HEALTH/9611/01/e.coli.poisoning/schlimme.10.aiff>

Text of audio clip: “At the farm level, you have farms grazing under the trees, so you have animal feces on the ground; apples fall on the ground, make juice out of them, and you have a problem.”

These are not highly sophisticated messages. They tell a simple informative story that the public needs to hear. When played a hundred thousand times or more across the nation, the public understands that the company is trying to help. While achieving a valid point of assistance, this tactic is marketing and propaganda at its best.

The crisis was consuming the news for days, and for Odwalla, time was running out. Their profits were so shaken by the situation, major investors were threatening to pull out their funding and customers were abandoning them by the droves. When the Website was first created, it took several days for it to have an effect; however; it eventually played a major role in diffusing the situation.

The objective of every crisis plan is to turn a crisis into a marketing opportunity. Such was the case with Odwalla. Notwithstanding a temporary drop in profits and the cost of recalling millions of bottles of apple juice, public confidence soared after the crisis and the corporation found a different cooking process for purification that was more efficient and cost effective than the previous one.

Figure 15

*Shell Oil Ken Saro-Wiwa crisis (1998)*

As with the discussion on Microsoft, the following discussion represents an analysis of the Shell.com home page, various Shell crisis pages, and excerpts from selected pages involving news, media, and other topics. These excerpts are meant to be exact duplications of the Webpages, however; some of the graphical user interface processes were not capable of being replicated. Any deviation from the Shell Website is unintentional. Note that Website excerpts are separated by single lines above and below the site content.

Horrific events affecting the people's lives, organizations and fortunes seem to occur randomly and frequently in the world business environment. The 9-11

World Trade Center explosion, the hijacking and explosion of the Pan Am Lockerbie Scotland jet, and the December 2004 Asian tsunami are examples. In these times, finding the means of indulging in routine business practice seems more than an insensitive act, it may appear as irrational to an incredulous and grieving public. Yet, perhaps there is no more important time to be diligent and strategic than in those times, 1) when there is violent unrest seemingly in all directions surrounding an organization; and 2) when the organization stands much to lose if some order is not brought to the situation. A calm head in the storm is sometimes the difference between chaos and peace.

On November 10, 1995, Nigerian poet and environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and nine co-defendants were hanged by General Abacha, the dictator of Nigeria, despite international pleas for clemency. Saro-Wiwa's execution came as he continued to be an activist against the regime and against the exploitation of the country's sensitive environmental resources while in prison.

Shell Oil controls most of the country's resources, having extracted an estimated \$30 billion worth of oil from Ogoniland since 1958. According to detractors before and after Saro-Wiwa's death (vehemently denied by Shell), Shell never used its influence or financial resources either to moderate the anti-democratic actions of General Abacha and previous authoritarian governments or to help the Ogoni People, from whose homeland, Ogoniland, Shell Oil had reaped enormous profits over the past few decades.

This sets the stage for Shell to have to respond to an almost unfathomable execution at the hands of the tribal government. It is an ultimate test of government

or corporate leaders when millions of people are begging for answers and pointing the finger in their direction.

Shell brilliantly integrated its response to the situation as part of their Website to manage the crisis (the site has now been removed). The strategy is similar to that of Microsoft Corp. Rather than reacting specifically to the Saro-Wiwa execution, Shell sought to show a long term strategic alliance with the Ogoni people, Ogoniland and the entire region. While Shell displayed extreme sadness and anger over the execution, the company effectively distanced themselves from complicity. True to their long term equity in the region, Shell also refused to condemn or exert influence in the trial. Recognizing the company's tremendous investment in Ogoniland, and the fact that if they interfered, that investment would be jeopardized, their statements treaded a very tight line of respectability.

In fact, the Abacha regime participated in brutality and genocide for years in Ogoniland, and Saro-Wiwa's execution was largely a result of his condemnation of the political situation there. While it is true Saro-Wiwa demonstrated against the exploitation of the land, his intransigence against the regime was a factor the dictator refused to overlook. The following represents content of the Website that managed the crisis for Shell.

Figure 16

### **News Updates for 1995**

**Verdict on Mr Ken Saro-Wiwa and Others**  
31/10/1995

The tribunal in the "Ogoni trials" has reached a verdict and found nine of the defendants guilty. Ken Saro-Wiwa has been found guilty of inciting the murder of four prominent Ogoni leaders.

**Figure 16 (cont'd)**

We have every sympathy with the families of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his co-defendants, and with the families of the murdered Ogonis. It is natural and understandable that the families of the people sentenced are making emotional and moving appeals on their behalf. Throughout the trial a number of respected organisations and campaigners raised questions over the fairness of the trial procedure. There are now demands that Shell should intervene, and use its perceived "influence" to have the judgement overturned. This would be dangerous and wrong. Ken Saro-Wiwa and his co-defendants were accused of a criminal offence. A commercial organisation like Shell cannot and must never interfere with the legal processes of any sovereign state. Those who call on us to do so might well be the first to criticise in any situation where that intervention did not suit their agenda. Any government, be it in Europe, North America or elsewhere, would not tolerate this type of interference by business. But what Shell has said, repeatedly and publicly, is that, while it does not agree with Ken Saro-Wiwa's approach or opinions, it nevertheless recognises his right to hold and air his views, and that he is entitled to due legal process and medical support. The Ogoni region is beset by a host of complex and difficult economic, social and ethnic problems. The violent scenes which resulted in the death of the four Ogoni leaders are a tragic example of the tensions running through these communities. If these problems are to be addressed successfully it will require compassion, good will and a real commitment to peaceful resolution of the region's problems by all concerned. Shell sympathises with many of the grievances felt by the communities in the oil producing regions of the Niger Delta, and while it will not intervene in Nigeria's domestic politics, it is involved in discussions with a wide range of groups who are interested in finding solutions to these complex issues. In addition, Shell makes its own contribution to improving the communities' quality of life, funding roads, clinics, schools, water schemes, scholarships and agricultural support projects. Spending on these community projects will reach more than US\$25 million this year alone."

**Execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his Co-defendants  
10/11/1995**

It is with deep regret that we hear this news. From the violence that led to the murder of the four Ogoni leaders in May last year through to the death penalty having been carried out, the human cost has been too high. Many Governments, individuals and organizations around the world, including Shell, made a plea for clemency. We believe that a commutation of the death sentences on humanitarian grounds would have helped towards the process of ultimate reconciliation in Ogoni land. This will now be a time for natural and understandable grief. It should also be a time for reflection on all sides. We sincerely hope that all parties will refrain from taking positions which may lead to further tragedy. There must be tolerance, understanding and co-operation if all of us are to move forward. With good will and a real commitment to the peaceful resolution of the problems still facing the people of the Nigeria Delta, we hope that this loss of life may never be repeated again in the future.

**The Environment and Ogoni Land  
12/11/1995**

In the coverage of the trial and death of Ken Saro-Wiwa emotional charges of environmental devastation have been laid at the door of Shell Nigeria. These allegations are false and misleading. The facts of the situation, where they do not suit the agenda of some of the activists, have often been distorted or ignored. We recognise that there are environmental problems in the area. But the recent World Bank survey confirmed that while the oil industry

### Figure 16 (cont'd)

has contributed to some of the environmental problems of the Niger Delta, population growth, deforestation, soil erosion and over farming have been other major factors. Shell Nigeria is carrying out extensive environmental and community programmes in the area, spending US \$100 million this year alone on environmental projects, and more than US \$20 million on roads, health clinics, schools, scholarships, water schemes and agricultural support projects to help the people of the region. In the Ogoni area - where Shell has not operated since 1993 - the situation has been compounded by sabotage. Over 60% of the spills in the Ogoni area have been the direct result of sabotage, usually linked to claims for compensation. And ,when contractors have attempted to re-enter the area to deal with these problems, they have been forcibly denied access by activists. It is estimated that over US \$42 million of plant and equipment has been destroyed in Ogoni land since Shell withdrew in 1993. The situation in the Niger Delta, and throughout Nigeria is fraught and complex, with economic, political and ethnic issues adding to the challenge the country faces. When the facts are simplified and distorted in the service of a campaign or cause - however well intentioned - the solution moves no closer.

#### **Execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his co-defendants – Statement by SPDC Managing Director Brian Anderson**

Shell Nigeria remains firmly committed to the long-term future of the country and its people. We believe our most useful role is helping Nigeria overcome its economic problems and creating wealth that will give the people of Nigeria a better living standard and open up for them more options for progress and development. We will continue to try to perform this role with efficiency and integrity and without becoming involved in politics. Calls by some for Shell to 'pull out' of Nigeria are not helpful. This would not hurt the Nigerian economy because Nigerian Shell staff, who make up 97 per cent of our workforce would have to continue oil operations or face extreme sanctions. The Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Project is of long-term benefit to Nigeria because it will create more than 6,000 jobs during construction and a significant number of jobs later on, which is particularly important in the delta region where employment levels are very low. No revenues will accrue from this project until the end of the decade. The project is also very important to the environment. The plant will process increasing amounts of gas currently flared in the Delta during oil production. Gas flaring is a major environmental concern of ours and the national and international community. The opportunity to do something to significantly reduce Nigeria's flared gas has come now. To stop the project would probably result in a very long delay and mean we will continue flaring a lot more gas well into the 21st century. Shell Nigeria is working hard on a programme of environmental improvements to its operations which are now well underway. This year we are spending more than US \$100 million on environmental programmes and this level of spending will continue for some time to come. We have never denied that there are some environmental problems connected with our operation and we are committed to dealing with them. However; we totally reject accusations of devastating Ogoni land or the Niger Delta. This has been dramatised out of all proportion. The total land we have acquired for operations to build our facilities, flowlines, pipelines and roads comes to just 0.3 per cent of the Niger Delta. In Ogoni land we have acquired just 0.7 per cent of the land area. These are very small figures that put the scale of our Niger Delta operations firmly in perspective. We believe significant environmental problems in the delta are caused by other factors, such as rising population, deforestation and over farming. However; we are aware that there are very few facts available

### Figure 16 (cont'd)

for informed debate and to decide how best to manage the needs for resource development and for sustaining the ecosystem of the Niger Delta. That is why we launched, and are helping to fund, a comprehensive and independent environmental survey of the Niger Delta area. This survey is under way and will begin delivering data in about six months' time. We are concerned about, and sympathise with, many of the grievances felt by the people of the oil producing Niger Delta and we commend the recent endorsement of the Constitutional Conference's proposal to increase to 13 per cent the allocation of revenue to states from which natural resources are produced. From our side, we continue our own policy of social investment and this year we are spending more than US \$20 million on roads, clinics, schools, scholarships, water schemes and agricultural support projects to help the people of the Niger Delta. During the MOSOP campaign we have also been accused of colluding with the military to subdue the Ogoni's campaign for a better deal. This charge is totally false and the facts, where they do not suit the agenda of some activists, have often been distorted or ignored. We withdrew all staff in January 1993 from Ogoni land in the face of increasing intimidation and attacks from some members of MOSOP. Since then we have repeatedly and publicly stated we had no plans to move back into the area and restart production and that we would return only when we are assured of the co-operation and support of all the Ogoni communities. In addition we stressed we would not return behind guns. This has been known to MOSOP and the government for a long time. We have no links with the military and have repeatedly spoken out against violence by all parties. Following the sentencing to death for murder of Mr. Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others at the Ogoni Civil Disturbances Tribunal, Shell appealed for clemency to the Head of State on humanitarian grounds. Our view was that a commutation of the death sentence would have helped towards the process of ultimate reconciliation in Ogoni land. It was not a comment on the proceedings of the tribunal. We believe as a multinational company that to interfere in such processes, whether political or legal, in any country would be wrong. We believe the time has come for dialogue and reconciliation. We welcome the sentiments of reflection and reconciliation recently expressed by Ken Wiwa in London. We are prepared to contribute to the debate, and to take positive action with the agreement and support of all the people of Ogoni land.

#### **Shell's investment in The Nigerian Liquefied Gas Project**

**17/11/1995**

Shell plans to invest in the Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Project. Some say we should pull out. And we understand why. But if we do so now, the project will collapse. Maybe for ever. So let's be clear about who we'd be hurting. Not the present Nigerian government, if that's the intention. The plant will take four years to build. The revenues won't start flowing until early next century. Of course the government of that time would suffer, but why should anyone want that? The people of the Niger Delta would certainly suffer - the thousands who will work on the project, and thousands more who will benefit in the local economy. And the environment would be hurt, because this plant will bring real benefits, with a great reduction in the need for gas flaring by the oil industry. Whatever you think of the Nigerian situation today, we know you wouldn't want us to hurt the Nigerian people. Or jeopardise their future. After Brent Spar, Greenpeace apologized for feeding the public false facts. This time, we thought you deserved to hear the truth.



## Figure 16 (cont'd)

### Clear Thinking in Troubled Times

19/11/1995

In the great wave of understandable emotion over the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa, it's very easy for the facts to be swamped by anger and recriminations. But people have the right to the truth. Unvarnished. Even uncomfortable. But never subjugated to a cause, however noble or well-meaning. They have the right to clear thinking. The situation in Nigeria has no easy solutions. Slogans, protests and boycotts don't offer answers. There are difficult issues to consider. First, did discreet diplomacy fail? Perhaps we should ask instead why the worldwide protests failed. Our experience suggests that quiet diplomacy offered the very best hope for Ken Saro-Wiwa. Did the protesters understand the risk they were taking? Did the campaign become more important than the cause? There have also been charges of environmental devastation. But the facts of the situation have often been distorted or ignored. The public - who rightly care deeply about these issues - have too often been manipulated and misled. There are certainly environmental problems in the area, but as the World Bank Survey has confirmed, in addition to the oil industry, population growth, deforestation, soil erosion and over-farming are also major environmental problems there. In fact, Shell and its partners are spending US\$100 million this year alone on environment-related projects, and US\$20 million on roads, health clinics, schools, scholarships, water schemes and agricultural support projects to help the people of the region. And, recognising that solutions need to be based on facts, they are sponsoring a \$4.5 million independent environmental survey of the Niger Delta. But another problem is sabotage. In the Ogoni area - where Shell has not operated since January 1993 - over 60% of oil spills were caused by sabotage, usually linked to claims for compensation. And when contractors have tried to deal with these problems, they have been forcibly denied access. It has also been suggested that Shell should pull out of Nigeria's Liquefied Natural Gas project. But if we do so now, the project will collapse. Maybe for ever. So let's be clear who gets hurt if the project is cancelled. A cancellation would certainly hurt the thousands of Nigerians who will be working on the project, and the tens of thousands more benefiting in the local economy. The environment, too, would suffer, with the plant expected to cut greatly the need for gas flaring in the oil industry. The plant will take four years to build. Revenues won't start flowing until early next century. It's only the people and the Nigerian Government of that time who will pay the price. And what would happen if Shell pulled out of Nigeria altogether? The oil would certainly continue flowing. The business would continue operating. The vast majority of employees would remain in place. But the sound and ethical business practices synonymous with Shell, the environmental investment, and the tens of millions of dollars spent on community programmes would all be lost. Again, it's the people of Nigeria that you would hurt. It's easy enough to sit in our comfortable homes in the West, calling for sanctions and boycotts against a developing country. But you have to be sure that knee-jerk reactions won't do more harm than good. Some campaigning groups say we should intervene in the political process in Nigeria. But even if we could, we must never do so. Politics is the business of governments and politicians. The world where companies use their economic influence to prop up or bring down governments would be a frightening and bleak one indeed.

Shell did not create an official crisis site; however, it integrated the Saro-Wiwa issue into its overall regional information policy in what I term as a blurring of lines between the crisis issue and its strategic involvement with the Ogoni people and the Ogoni nation. What I mean by this is that, as with Microsoft, Shell adopted a larger view to the crisis. This was appropriate especially since the execution was

affiliated with Saro-Wiwa's political stance in some of Shell's aggressive drilling approaches on or around Ogoniland. Given Shell's investment in the region, it was a necessity to make a comment on the political crisis there, but also to make obvious its equity position there. Having said this, Shell could not make blatant or condemning comments of any kind aimed toward any faction. For example, while it was obligatory and appropriate for Shell to express sadness and grief over Saro-Wiwa's execution, their reaction had to be measured and very concise. There could not have been a condemnation of the political extremists involved in the assassination. To do so would have been overly demonstrative, and that clearly would have crossed the line of respectability with the regime and the activists on both sides. Instead, Shell integrated the events of the Saro-Wiwa crisis into part of their ongoing dealings with the Ogoni people.

As with Microsoft, the strategy was to present an intimate kinship with their market and their stakeholders. It was presented as if there was a before-the-crisis and an after-the-crisis event; with the execution itself, however tragic, as a blip on the continuum. The strategy was intended not to diminish the significance and tragedy of the execution, but to paint a bigger picture—of a long term equity relationship with the Ogoni's, of vital interest to all concerned. That a tragic situation occurred was not lost on anyone, however; Shell was so articulate and sympathetic to the crisis, the strategy helped to diffuse their perceived role in the situation.

The second part of the Website stepped back from the events even further. Part one presented above drew a line directly to issues in Ogoniland past, present and

future. The bigger picture was offered to place the situation in a larger context. Here are these parts:

## Figure 17

### ***Shell Nigeria***

#### Our Community

How much of the profits from oil and gas are spent on the social and economic development of the Niger Delta area? Find out what our stakeholders and partners think. See how we're living up to the targets we've set and the promises we've made. Today our sustainable community development programme in the Niger Delta region is based on the principles of sustainable development and best global practice. We invest in health, education, agriculture, job creation, women's programmes, youth training and sponsorship. Everything we do is guided by expert advice from our stakeholders and strategic partners and increasingly open and honest communication with the communities.

One of the major challenges we face in communities is the pressure for cash payments for non-legitimate reasons. Cash payments (e.g. to community youths for access fees, standby labour, etc) have been blamed for inter-community disputes and for distorting genuine community needs. Two of the big rules rolled out under our new SCD approach are aimed at addressing this. The SCD big rules is a set of 13 principles that underpin our new SCD strategy with the aim of ensuring transparency, accountability and consistency in the way we interact with communities.

#### Our Environment

Shell companies in Nigeria use only a small area of land in the Niger Delta. How do we manage this land and the waterways and coastal areas in which we operate? Have things changed in the last few years? Find out more and tell us what you think about our environmental performance today.

#### Issues and Dilemmas

During the 1990s, we were heavily criticised for our lack of commitment to Human Rights, for our environmental track record and for failing to address the needs of the communities of the Niger Delta. There have even been accusations of corrupt practices in relation to our Community Development projects. Some of these issues are in the past, but many continue to be debated in the world press. You can read our current stand on these topics in this section.

#### Nigeria and its People

Nigeria has more than 250 different ethnic groups each with its own traditions and language. This section gives a brief introduction to Nigeria's geography, history and rich cultural heritage.

I call attention to the links called *Our Community*, *Our Environment*, *Issues and Dilemmas* and *Nigeria and its People*. Each has several supporting layers of

philosophical discussion of Shell's views of the region, the people and the issues.

This is the power of language that Cicero so often referred to. Even the most adamant critics would have taken pause to listen to these discussions.

As the Greek scholars proposed, in situations when the doors seem ready to shut tightly, there is a need to appeal to a higher audience using a different debate. Shell could not become overly prominent either in condemning the execution of Saro-Wiwa or in suggesting complicity in any way. Their only course was to redefine the question to one they could answer, and they did so by creating a brilliant crisis Website.

#### *Unsuccessful Examples of Crisis Websites*

Special event Websites will not always resolve problems and occasionally if the timing is bad or the site has misdirected content, the effort will be counterproductive. There is little question that even when a site is successful, it will have many detractors, depending on the situation. A special Website should be created to address a variety of issues—perhaps a global theme, and not just some dedicated antagonists.

It is a difficult proposition to find too many unsuccessful crisis Websites. This is a relatively new tool, and most of the time sites are created and removed within a matter of weeks. Therefore, unless crisis sites are chronicled in literature or you find one by luck, they are fleeting occurrences. I happened on one recently through some bad media pointing in its direction.

*Cobb School System/ Purchase of Laptops for 88,000 Students and Teachers*

## Background:

In 2004, the Cobb County School Superintendent proposed spending \$80 million for the purpose of buying laptops for all teachers, middle and high school students. Partly because of the energized and polarized political climate in Cobb, there was an immediate and visceral reaction from much of the community, fueled by some very vocal and powerful opponents. The Superintendent and school board hurt their cause by making many of their decisions in secret meetings outside of the sight of the media.

One of the most pressing issues was that the publisher of the community newspaper is also a past State School Superintendent who is consistently at odds with the local school board. As a result, the marathon issue was on the front page of the community newspaper for months criticizing the local superintendent and the board. Therefore, the politics of this situation is very bad, and the forces against the proposition have financial and political muscle.

One of the early developments in the saga was the creation of a link on the Cobb County School System home page in which the local school superintendent responded to media charges. It is clearly an attempt to abate the crisis.

In this Website, the Superintendent Joe Redden criticized the media attention and community responses, claiming all were biased, political attempts and character assassinations (probably pretty much on target). This response Website did not work well. It became a crisis of its own, with numerous negative letters to the editor and

critical articles in both local and state newspapers. We should explore the reasons this Website did not resolve the problems.

One of the problems with special (crisis) sites is that they will never satisfy everyone, and sometimes it is possible they may not satisfy the majority of users. Executives must weigh the advantages over the disadvantages. In the case of the Cobb School Board, had I been the chief communications officer, I might have posed the following questions:

1. Where do we now stand in the life history of the crisis—prodromal stage, acute crisis stage, chronic crisis stage, or crisis recovery stage? If the crisis is in the early stages, then there may be many options available, such as use of a Website, an aggressive media campaign, formation of a crisis team for overall coordination of the situation, and others. If the crisis is in the later stages, then it may be preferential to avoid further visibility. I believe when the Superintendent created the crisis site, the crisis was in the middle to latter chronic crisis stage—thus almost unrecoverable from the standpoint of saving reputation.
2. What is the status of the relationship between the organization and important stakeholders? If the answer is “not so good,” then my next direction would be to try and improve those relationships. If that was not possible, then it might force a mea culpa and a good deal of backtracking. If the relationships are good, then it might be a good idea to ask those stakeholders to form an alliance to assist with the situation. In the case of the school superintendent, there were a few

community leaders standing by his side, but the overwhelming majority of *key* stakeholders were distancing themselves from him.

This included the Chairman of the County Commission, a number of teachers and teacher groups (who ostensibly should have been ecstatic over his laptop program), various state legislators and several important members of the School Board. Once these stakeholders decided their positions against the program, it would have been nearly impossible to salvage the laptop purchases. Damage control would have clearly been the appropriate choice.

3. What exactly are the stakes involved? A classic vulnerability analysis would have been in order when the first hints of negative media occurred. Instead of digging into their position, the Superintendent should have been reaching out. A quickly formed crisis team could have forensically established a crisis intensity scale to determine overall liability. Given the negative stakeholder issues and highly charged political environment, an early examination of crisis intensity would surely have revealed a very questionable situation that was requiring of some prompt action.
4. Finally, how can we affect damage control? We have lost this battle, and now have to figure how we can avoid losing the war. The superintendent made rookie mistakes in holding his ground and fighting back in the media. That was a key error. However; once the political momentum had shifted against the laptop purchase, he and his

senior staff should have been examining ways of lessening the collateral damage to the boss and to the organization. Granted the laptop program was dead. But a crisis management point of view would have given process, perspective and timing to bailing out with as little damage as possible. This tactic still has not happened.

The media furor of even the most toxic and visible media issues will ultimately diminish. Events of war, scandal, political shake-up, act-of-God disaster and even the 9-11 attack on the World Trade Center sooner or later begin to lose their appeal to the public. We may all have a place in our heart for great losses, but the passion will fade over time. When that happens the media loses interest and the issue goes away. Again, the fickle public is always a factor, and the next crisis is only a column away.

In the case of the Cobb County school superintendent, classic political mistakes were made. He overlooked some very basic stakeholder relationship issues: 1) that the newspaper publisher was recently the chairman of the state board of education; 2) that the publisher should have been consulted, if for no other reason that the publisher was also one of the leaders of the community; 3) recalling an old adage—never pick a fight with someone who buys ink by the barrel; 4) there were no contingencies in place in the event the situation turned sour, and 5) the Website never attempted to create a relationship with either advocacy groups or adversarial groups—the copy was an “in your face” type discussion that seemed negative to all groups.



One of the greatest mistakes by the Superintendent was in not developing relationships with his stakeholders and reaching out to them before he took a leap to purchase \$100 million in laptops that had not been approved by the voters. Had he done so, he might have resolved the media's problems in advance. In the case of the laptop purchases, he might have elected not to go forward with the program. However; given the power, visibility, and direction of the media, it is probable that any amount of explanation or response would have only further fueled the debate. Therefore, the response Website was doomed before it began, thus this really is not about a failed crisis Website, rather a failed political strategy.

The Cobb School System Communications Office link itemized a number of issues, including press releases, regarding the laptop program during the previous several months, noting elements of the crisis and other issues relating to the system (on the left hand side of the Web page. The link entitled "Media Monitor," was the Superintendent's crisis site (note the *Media Monitor* section on the right hand side of the Webpage).



Immediately following the presence of this link, the Marietta Daily Journal began critiquing the responses, and the back-and-forth dialogue became quite entertaining. It is noteworthy that the text in these letters and responses appear to be random and disjointed without clear intent, organization and with no progression of ideas. Not only were the responses ill-conceived, for the most part they are poorly written and poorly communicated.

Note that the responses from the Superintendent and his staff are vitriolic and condemning—hardly worthy of a high government or academic official. The individual responses are noted below. It comes off as a childish attempt to “squeal on” someone who needs to be punished. And it is further noteworthy that much of the copy is aimed at media that has been written under the guidance of the newspaper publisher, who is also a prominent community leader. One of the problems in getting in this type of detail is that it gives opponents fodder for their tactics, and tends to escalate the discussion in the media. Most importantly, the banter is entirely in the minds of those writing about it. The public understands little of the discussion and has difficulty putting the pieces together, especially in a protracted debate.

### **Notes on Local Media Coverage of the School District**

These responses from the county school superintendent were posted on the Cobb School System Website as a crisis response site, on the issue of several articles written in the Atlanta Journal Constitution and the Marietta Daily Journal. Grammar and punctuation are as written in the responses.

#### **Figure 18**

##### MDJ Reporter Coaxes Teacher to Access Porn Site

Marietta Daily Journal education reporter **Jon Gillooly** coaxed a Cobb County teacher to access an Internet pornography site during a recent teacher training session. Gillooly was invited to attend the training session at Harrison High School on May 23, 2005. Teachers were issued Apple iBook computers that day and were receiving training in the use of the laptops. Gillooly was invited to observe the training taking place in one of the classrooms. While the training was ongoing, Gillooly began coaxing a teacher sitting next to him to attempt to access a pornographic Web site. Eventually, the teacher did try to access the site, but the attempt was blocked by the District’s network security system.

Confronted about the incident afterward, Gillooly admitted his role and said, “I

Figure 18 (cont'd)

was impressed that the District's security system blocked it." The School District's Internet Use Rule prohibits students and employees from accessing inappropriate Web sites on the school district network.

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**UPDATE, June 3, 2005:**

Marietta Daily Journal reporters on Friday barraged school district offices with questions regarding the posting of the above article on reporter Jon Gillooly's behavior at Harrison High School on May 23. The newspaper's questions, sent via

e-mail, attempt to shift attention away from the fact that Gillooly distracted a teacher during an official school district training session in order to coax her to access Internet pornography. Instead of answering the newspaper's rhetorical questions, the post above will remain to speak for itself. The newspaper apparently intends to portray Gillooly's efforts as a perfectly appropriate attempt to test the school district's network security system. The teacher, also contacted by an MDJ reporter on Friday, responded to the newspaper with this e-mail:

"After thinking a little more about your question, I do want to add that I was surprised that, as a guest observing the training that Mr. Gillooly would even ask that I attempt to access an unauthorized site. It was inappropriate, but I do have confidence in our district's current technology tools, both instructional and protective, to ensure the best and most appropriate use of technology for our students."

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**June 2, 2005**

An article by **Jon Gillooly** in the May 17, 2005 edition of the Marietta Daily Journal under the headline "\$500-an-hour consultant has Apple background" was false. This article incorrectly implied a conflict of interest regarding the school district's relationship with **Alan November**, an instructional technology consultant. Referring to Mr. November, the article stated:

*"The consultant worked for Apple Computer in the 1990s and later served on the committee that chose Apple as the supplier for Cobb's laptop program, which could cost as much as \$100.8 million when fully implemented.*

*But November's prior position with Apple and his later influence in choosing the company as the supplier for the district's laptop program has raised the eyebrows of some school board members."*

The statement that Mr. November served on the committee that chose Apple as the supplier for Cobb's laptop program is false. Mr. November was not part of the committee that evaluated the proposal from Apple or any other vendor. In fact, Mr. November has played no role whatsoever in Power To Learn until this month,

### Figure 18 (cont'd)

when he was asked to participate in the selection of the high school pilot sites and to conduct two days of teacher training.

The reporter has claimed that he assumed Mr. November served on the committee because Mr. November's name is listed on a memo as an "outsideconsultant". But that list is merely a compilation of consultants whose services were available, and, in fact, neither the District nor the committee ever contacted Mr. November. Most egregious is that the mention of outside consultants appears on the same page as the list of the actual committee members who did select the vendor for Power To Learn. This committee is clearly labeled, and Mr. November's name is not among them. The reporter could have confirmed Mr. November's status with a simple phone call or e-mail.

In addition, while Mr. November has consulted for Apple on a few occasions, just as he has for IBM, Dell, and other technology companies, he has never been an employee of the company. Mr. November has consulted with all the major computer companies that applied for Power To Learn. For the newspaper to omit this information undermines Mr. November's integrity and the process the District followed in selecting a vendor for Power To Learn.

On May 25, 2005, after being contacted by Mr. November's attorney, the Marietta Daily Journal printed the following statement:

#### **Correction and clarification**

On Tuesday, May 17, 2005, the Marietta Daily Journal ran a story headlined "\$500-an-hour consultant has Apple background" concerning Dr. Alan November, a consultant to the Cobb County School Board. The article stated that Dr. November "worked for Apple Computer in the 1990s." Dr. November's Web site in fact states that November was an "Apple Teaching Fellow, Central Operations, Apple Computer Corporation" from 1991-1994. His "Professional History" states that he was a "District Technology Consultant, Glenbrook High Schools, Northbrook, Illinois," 1990-1994. On May 24, 2005, November was featured on the first page of the Web site "Apple Learning Interchange" ([www.ali.apple.com](http://www.ali.apple.com)) of Apple Computer Inc. as a Web lecturer on "Fearless Learners and Courageous Teachers." The link to Dr. November's site, [www.novemberlearning.com](http://www.novemberlearning.com), provides his well-presented lecture for educators concerning such topics as "Information Literacy" and features Dr. November holding an Apple laptop computer. A spokesman for Dr. November stated to the Marietta Daily Journal that Dr. November "probably" had consulted for Apple Computer Inc. in the past, but also for IBM and Dell. The MDJ article also stated that Dr. November was a "consultant" to the Cobb County School Board and served on the "committee" that chose Apple as the supplier to Cobb Schools. A spokesman for the Cobb County School District states that "Dr. November never served on the (Process) committee that chose Apple, and never consulted with Cobb regarding Power to Learn until last week (May 2005)." The Cobb School Board memorandum, dated Feb. 8, 2005, "RFP 2504 Power to Learn Process Summary" lists "Alan November -Internationally recognized instructional leader" as an "Outside Consultant" to the Process, and not as a member of the committees listed. The Marietta Daily Journal regrets any confusion concerning Dr. November's role in the Process.

## Figure 18 (cont'd)

This item was printed inside the newspaper on Page 2A. The original false article appeared on the front page of the Cobb/State section. Except for the headline that presents the item as a "Correction and clarification", the newspaper fails to acknowledge that its article was wrong, and admits only that the article may have caused "confusion".

**5/05**

Recent articles and editorials in the Marietta Daily Journal have misrepresented the facts by suggesting that the Cobb County School District and Superintendent **Joseph Redden** could have secured a better deal for Cobb's laptop computer initiative simply because another school district in another state may have received a lower price. The newspaper reported that Henrico County, Va., schools signed a lower-cost contract with Dell Computer to continue that school district's four-year-old laptop initiative.

On May 4, 2005, reporter **Jon Gillooly** wrote:

*Henrico is paying \$270 per computer less with its new contract with Dell than Cobb is with Apple. With the same deal, Redden could have saved approximately \$4,266,000 for the \$25 million first phase of the contract by negotiating the same contract with Dell that Henrico did, and approximately \$17 million for the full contract with the Dell deal.*

And on May 5, 2005, an unsigned editorial stated:

*A logical step would have been for the board to direct [Redden] to dial Dell and see if it would extend the same lower price-per-laptop contract to Cobb that it had just offered Henrico.*

The newspaper is wrong to suggest that Cobb County could have secured the same deal that Dell agreed to with Henrico. As the newspaper is fully aware, Dell is one of four vendors that *did* bid on Cobb's plan to provide laptops to teachers, upgrade middle school labs, and establish four high school pilot sites where the district will test the concept of issuing laptops to students. Dell's proposal for the four-year lease came in \$3.6 million higher than Apple's.

Cobb negotiated with Apple, Dell, IBM and Hewlett-Packard over a period of five months to secure the best deal for its laptop program. Vendors were asked to submit proposals for a comprehensive package that would provide laptops, software, ongoing technical support and training, backup batteries, and an evaluation of the program, among other specifications. Apple offered Cobb a lease price of \$350 per computer per year, or a total of \$1,400 for the four-year lease. Dell's proposal was \$404 per computer per year, and more than \$1,600 for the four-year lease. In Henrico, the situation was reversed, with Dell providing the lower bid for that district's specific requirements.

The newspaper implies that the circumstances in Henrico and Cobb were the same and that the vendors were bidding on identical projects. But clearly, the

**Figure 18 (cont'd)**

circumstances and needs in each school district are very different. Henrico's laptop program, for instance, has been in place for four years and the district has a well-established technical infrastructure already in place. That already established infrastructure will facilitate the transition to the next phase of Henrico's program. In addition, all of Henrico's teachers and many of its students are already trained in the use of the laptops. This training will also facilitate Dell's rollout in Henrico.

In Cobb County, the introduction of laptops to teachers and students is a brand new concept. Technical infrastructure, training and support will have to be built from day one of the program.

To reach its conclusion that Cobb could have attained the same price from Dell, the newspaper assumes:

- The RFPs from each district had identical requirements and expectations. They did not.
- The equipment proposed for each district was identical. It is not.
- The maintenance requirements are the same in each district. They are not.
- Component manufacturers provided the same incentives for each program. They clearly did not.

It is likely that the different circumstances in each system played a major role in what the vendors were prepared to bid on each project. Cobb County accepted the lowest bid for its laptop initiative following months of rigorous negotiation, as did Henrico. Both school districts did very thorough jobs of negotiating contracts that will provide the best use of taxpayer dollars for their respective programs. For the newspaper to imply that all factors were equal, and that Cobb could have secured the same deal with Dell as Henrico, is disingenuous at best. Dell had an opportunity to win the contract for Cobb's program, but its bid was \$3.6 million too high.

Henrico's deal presents many encouraging signs that the newspaper has chosen to ignore. For one, it shows that there is flexibility for school districts to switch computer vendors, because laptop programs are about using technology to teach students, not about which computer is used. Henrico's deal is also a positive sign that, should Cobb choose to continue its laptop program in the future as Henrico has, it can expect lower pricing once its support infrastructure and training are developed.

But the most important news from Henrico is that the school board and community have overwhelmingly supported continuing their laptop initiative, and that the program is beginning to show real benefits for students in the classroom. Cobb County is looking forward to similar results from its Power To Learn program in the near future.

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**12/17/04**

### Figure 18 (cont'd)

An article in the Dec. 17, 2004 Marietta Daily Journal by reporter **Jon Gillooly** presents a slanted view of school start dates and, in one instance, reports plainly false information. In addition, e-mail communications between the school district spokesman and the reporter reveal that the reporter knew in advance that a statement in his article was inaccurate. In its ongoing efforts to characterize the Cobb County School District's start date as too early in order to appease a minority faction of school district parents who prefer a post-Labor Day start, the newspaper has knowingly printed errors of fact and has crossed the line of ethical propriety.

The newspaper article includes the following errors and misrepresentations:

- The article cites 29 school districts nationwide that have later start dates than Cobb County. The article presents the 29 districts as a valid statistical sample, even when there are 14,891 school districts nationwide. The article gives no explanation for how the districts were selected, why it chose 29 districts, or why all 29 coincidentally have later start dates than Cobb County. In addition, the article makes no attempt to explain the economic and climate reasons for why northern schools start later than schools in the South. Of the few southern districts listed, all have start dates much nearer to Cobb County's.
- The article states that the recently approved Aug. 10, 2005 start date for Cobb County schools is "controversial" even though 90 percent of respondents to an e-mail survey supported the district's recommendations. Prior to the calendar's approval, the school district conducted an e-mail survey asking for community and staff preferences. The district received 2,965 responses, of which 2,663 – or 90 percent – indicated a preference for a start date as early as August 8, 2005. On Nov. 10, 2004, a small group of community members who prefer a post-Labor Day start date attended a school board forum on the issue. Several of the attendees angrily shouted at school board and staff members, waved signs and were verbally abusive in expressing their opposition to the then-proposed start date. According to the Marietta Daily Journal's own account of the forum, only 20 people spoke against the calendar proposal that the newspaper calls "controversial".
- The article states, "The Cobb School District claims the federal No Child Left Behind Act passed by President George W. Bush is one of its reasons for the controversial and early start date." This statement is false. The school district has never claimed that its start date has anything to do with the No Child Left Behind Act. In fact, Cobb County has started school the second week of August for five consecutive years, dating back well before No Child Left Behind was even proposed as law. During public discussion of the 2005-2006 calendar, the superintendent noted that the Monday and Tuesday before Thanksgiving are traditionally two of the highest absenteeism dates during the school year. He observed that by giving families these days off, the school district could reduce absenteeism and thereby lessen the potential for consequences under the No Child Left Behind Act's strict absenteeism standards. But neither the superintendent nor anyone else in the school district has ever said that the school district's start date is a means of complying with the No Child Left Behind Act, as the Marietta Daily Journal states. On December 10, 2004, reporter Gillooly e-mailed school district communications director Jay Dillon and asked, "Is one of the arguments for an earlier school start date to combat absenteeism thereby

Figure 18 (cont'd)

avoiding possible punishment under No Child Left Behind?" Dillon's reply: "No, it is not. That is one of the arguments for making the whole week of Thanksgiving vacation." Gillooly included the false statement in the article anyway. In fact, even as he ignored the e-mail which plainly stated there is no connection between the school start date and No Child Left Behind, Gillooly cited as his only supporting evidence a statement Dillon had made weeks earlier to a television news station, "We have to meet these standards (No Child Left Behind) and, frankly, the only way to do that is for us to intervene in certain cases with children who need help." Quoting information given to another news source raises its own ethical questions, but the statement quoted second-hand by the Marietta Daily Journal makes no reference at all to school start dates. In fact, the statement was part of a discussion of the "balanced calendar" concept the district had researched and decided not to pursue earlier in 2004. The balanced calendar concept creates intercession weeks in the middle of the fall and spring semesters to assist students in need of academic help, which is what the statement references.

- The article contains a quote from parent Vivian Jackson who states: "Every time Jay Dillon sends you something, No Child Left Behind is his pat answer," Ms. Jackson said. "It's beyond me." Jay Dillon has never spoken to or communicated with Vivian Jackson regarding the school calendar or No Child Left Behind.

The school district has asked the newspaper to print a retraction of the article.

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**10/26/04**

A front-page article in the October 26, 2004 edition of the **Marietta Daily Journal** by reporter **Jon Gillooly** was incorrect. The article stated that the Power To Learn laptop computer initiative under consideration by the school district "may cost up to \$131 million." The reporter based this dollar amount on an internal e-mail provided to him by the school district. The reporter was informed that the e-mail was not an estimate of the cost of the Power To Learn laptop program, which is expected to be substantially less than \$131 million. The school district's request for a retraction of the article was denied by editor **Billy Mitchell**.

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The letter below is typical of the type of public response to the superintendent's detailed statements. In the following weeks, there were more than twenty negative letters to the editor. Remember that the publisher, and owner, of this newspaper has a personal stake in the proceedings.



## Figure 19

Marietta Daily Journal  
Tuesday, June 14, 2005

Mike Klodnicki:

The smell from the reign of Joe Redden continues to grow worse - with another shameful misuse and abuse of our tax dollars! The jokingly named "Media Monitor - Responses to Media Inaccuracies" on the Cobb County Schools Web site is the latest foul odor emanating from Superintendent Joe Redden and henchman Jay Dillon.

The post from June 3, titled "MDJ Reporter Coaxes Teacher To Access Porn Site," does not address any media inaccuracy. It simply describes MDJ reporter Jon Gillooly's request to a teacher to test an Apple laptop's capability to block porn sites, a prime issue of concern to many parents (although it wouldn't be surprising if Chairwoman Kathie Johnstone said her e-mail on that issue - as she claims on all laptop issues - is running about 50-50 in favor and against).

It's an incredible abuse of power - and an arrogant misuse of our tax dollars - for Redden and Dillon to run such an astoundingly misleading headline and item on a Web site that should have the sole purpose of improving our children's public education. Running a picture of Gillooly with the item only magnifies their true intent - to try to embarrass Gillooly and shame the MDJ. There's never been a better example of how badly Redden and Dillon have lost sight of the true purpose and objective of their jobs and roles - and what we - as taxpayers - pay them to do.

Here's a challenge to any school board member: Please explain how the June 3 post benefits our children's public education and why we taxpayers are paying for you to allow shrill, tabloid-like misinformation on our school district Web site. (Maybe the next step is for Redden and Dillon to hire Dan Rather and Newsweek as the Cobb County school district's newest high-priced consultants.)

Here's another challenge: How might a dynamic, forward-thinking, progressive school superintendent and school board responded to Gillooly's attempt to test an Apple laptop's porn-blocking capability?

How about by providing a report detailing how tests have shown that the Apple laptops' security systems are successful in preventing access to porn sites? Why not present data and details to alleviate parents' and teachers' concerns about students' potential ability to use the laptops to access those types of sites?

Maybe we don't get that kind of information because the Apple laptops haven't been tested. Or maybe the results of testing are not what Apple, Redden and Dillon want the public to know.

We don't know the real answers. Redden and Dillon don't respond to questions from the MDJ or to e-mails from the public. In the meantime, with our tax dollars, by paying for the Cobb schools' Web site - we are paying for Redden's attacks on the MDJ through the "Media Monitor."

C'mon Joe Redden. If you want to start your own personal anti-MDJ blog, get your own personal Web site on which to do it, and pay for it with your own money. Here are a few suggestions for naming your site:

"I Love Apples"

"Every Student Should Have One To Take Home No Matter What And You Should Pay For Them.com"

"I'm In Charge - You're Not So Go Away.com"

Figure 19 (cont'd)

"ReddonCarverNovemberJohnstoneJohnstonSearcyJohnsonPlenge-10,Taxpayers-0.com"

Better yet Joe, write opinion columns or letters to the MDJ. I'm sure this newspaper would welcome your thoughts and perspectives on these issues. Taxpayers would love to hear more of what you have to say as well. Most importantly, whatever way you do it, stop using our tax dollars to pay for your rants and misinformation. You're embarrassing Cobb County and wasting more of our money.

Jay Dillon's performance is a disgrace to the public relations profession. Instead of honestly and openly communicating with the public, earning trust and building a mutually beneficial relationships, he spends his time doing as he's told and attacking the MDJ and anyone who raises an opinion not in agreement with Redden. He's likely only obeying commands, but any true PR professional can only cringe at his ethics and behavior.

It would be interesting to know where the budget dollars come from to pay for "Media Monitor." Certainly, the SPLOST didn't include a line item for a Web site section to serve as Joe Redden's personal vendetta against the MDJ. Then again, it very likely doesn't matter to him.

The smell does continue to grow, and there are only two ways to stop it - through the courts and through the next round of school board elections.

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The saga continues. As of the date of the writing of this dissertation, State Court Judge Lark Ingram, responding to a lawsuit by a local community leader, placed a permanent injunction on the laptop program because she ruled that it was in direct conflict with the original purposes of the county's technology funding program. Additionally, after an independently authored audit of the laptop program produced negative results for the school superintendent School Board went into several closed-door sessions to consider termination of the contract of the Superintendent and his senior staff because of their (the Board's) consideration of his malfeasance of office.

The result was that on August 24, 2005, the Superintendent resigned, stating his unqualified support for the laptop program and procurement process. The article in the Marietta Daily Journal stated:

Figure 20

“Cobb County schools Superintendent Joseph Redden announced his immediate resignation Tuesday, after months of controversy over a stalled multimillion-dollar program to provide all students and teachers with laptop computers. We've got a divided board, we're spending far too much time [on this]," said Redden, a retired three-star Air Force general who was hired to lead the 104,000-student Cobb school system in November 2000. For the good of the district, this helps us move forward. No individual is more important than the organization” (Torres 1).

The text of his letter is as follows:

Figure 21

“From Superintendent Joe Redden: Dear Cobb County School District Staff: Today I have submitted my resignation as Superintendent of the Cobb County School District, effective Wednesday, August 24, 2005. Clearly the best interest of the District lies in moving forward to serve the children of Cobb County, and I don't believe that under current circumstances we are able to do so effectively. I know that being the group of extraordinary professionals you are, you will now find the opportunity to achieve new levels of success as you put your focus on

the achievement of students without the added distractions that have consumed our energy of late. As I leave, I want to commend you for

Figure 21 (cont'd)

the outstanding work you have done over the last four and a half years.

We all should take great pride in the consistent academic growth that we have enjoyed in the District, and the many achievements of our students and staff. The foundation of excellence in leadership and instruction exists in all of our schools. If it is nurtured, we can expect even better results in the future. However; you should never lose sight of the fact that we cannot expect to achieve as a District unless we provide the opportunity to be successful to each of our students. That means coming to grips with what we will need to serve all students in the future. Having the opportunity to work with outstanding professionals throughout our District has been a wonderful experience. Being at your schools and observing your great work never failed to inspire me. I know your dedication and passion for excellence will continue to secure a great future for all Cobb's children. Joe Redden” (Redden 1).

In summary, this crisis is not so much about the poorly designed, written, and implemented crisis Website by the soon-to-be-former school superintendent; it is primarily about a crisis situation that was handled in a very unprofessional way. Granted, the crisis site represented a poor decision by the embattled county executive and his communication office. Additionally, the site was poorly written and

designed. However; the most important fault was that the administrators had failed to develop and maintain important stakeholder relationships and to implement any type of crisis management leadership.

### *Chapter Summary*

Hill and White concluded, “The World Wide Web is becoming a significant communications tool for businesses and organizations. Web sites are used to keep stakeholders up-to-date, provide information to the media, gather information about publics, strengthen corporate identity, and a host of other public relations functions. Most Fortune 500 companies use Web sites for external communication, focusing on promoting the company image and enhancing public relations rather than for direct sales or other revenue generating activities. The trend to use Web sites for public relations—type activities is noteworthy.

White and Raman contended that the Web is the first controlled public relations mass medium in that content reaches a mass audience, but is not filtered through gatekeepers. Traditionally in public relations, controlled messages are sent through newsletters, annual reports, and other vehicles written by communication professionals in an organization. Before the advent of the World Wide Web, advertising was the only way to send a controlled message to a mass audience through a mass medium” (31, 32).

There is significant potential for dialogic connectivity through the Internet. Perry, Doerful and Taylor confirmed this potential looking specifically at use of the Internet as a public relations tool in a crisis. There is also substantial reason to

engage the use of the Web platform for delivery of information during a crisis or in crisis planning. The electronic medium is inexpensive and available thus allowing distribution and dispersion in many ways.

While Kent, Taylor, and White express reservations over making too many conclusions over Web content and its effects on the user, their empirical studies have shown the Web to be excellent tools for building stakeholder relations. Even so, they argue that executives and designers have not successfully collaborated to consistently produce the effects necessary for what they call dialogic connectivity (73-75). Their analysis suggests an important use of the Web for public relations and for crisis management, however; they also agree with Perry, Doerful, and Taylor in emphasizing that such use is in its infancy.

It is clear that not only can the Web provide a vehicle for managing information flow, it allows a platform for access to and from employees, stakeholders, and the public far overshadowing any other means of information distribution. The Web can be a comprehensive tactical tool for crisis management. From the onset of a crisis management plan to the heat of a crisis event and throughout the life history of a crisis, the Web can provide employees, the media, stakeholders, and the public with vital information. Many organizations are using the Web for strategic positioning of information. Yet this type of strategic tool is just becoming known in the marketplace.

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## CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS

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### *Introduction*

It is relevant to the discussion of crisis management that American executives currently tend to prioritize organizational communication issues well below production and sales. If you are a P.R. or media person in an organization in America, your job is always in jeopardy and your personnel evaluation is typically “what have you done for me today!” This maxim, while probably not conducive to achieving maximum efficiency in operations *or* a completely enjoyable workplace, sufficed as a business approach until the latter part of the twentieth century.

Changes in technology, the speed, and volume of the movement of information, media strategies, and the sheer pervasiveness and invasiveness of media now require executives to pay more attention to communication issues as a vital element of operations. This holds true for both internal and external discourse communities related to an organization. Where once, messaging elements in the discourse community could be left to their own design and an organization could succeed in its business without dabbling in such issues, to do so in the information environment that now exists almost insures increased risk of damaging and perhaps debilitating crisis. Just as communication seems to play an increasingly important role in the health of an organization, the ability to withstand crisis is often dependent on the health of communication within the discourse community. Future executives should refine management policies to reflect the evolving world of communication that include new technologies, and increased access by stakeholders.

Much of crisis management is dependent upon both long and short term communication strategies. Properly designed and implemented crisis planning helps organizations diminish the incidence of crisis and reduce the impact of crisis when it occurs. If the definition of crisis is a window of opportunity following an event in which decisions must be made that will significantly impact the operations of an organization, then we can deduce that organizations must re-define their perception of what constitutes a crisis. Understanding those issues, prioritizing them and implementing a plan to deal with them is a necessity in today's complex business environment. My conclusions include elements of widely accepted business methodology in practice today as well as some logical and essential extensions.

Conclusion 1: Communication is a vital and inextricable element of crisis management methodology. As Marra concluded, "The underlying communication culture of an organization and the level of autonomy or power of the public relations department within an organization can easily prevent (or enhance) practitioners from implementing the best crisis communication plan" (464). As a result, crisis plans that do not examine a broad context of communication strategies to a variety of stakeholders in the discourse community will not likely succeed.

Conclusion 2: A) Crises are not restricted to large corporations—in fact, they exist in every organization; B) Crises are not restricted to acts of God and other cataclysmic events, instead existing in a wide spectrum of situations; and C) It is beneficial for organizations to utilize crisis examination and implementation methodology across many levels of decisionmaking. During organizational self-



examination, executives should correlate crisis intensity with probability and all potential crisis issues.

Conclusion 3: There are accepted processes of crisis evaluation and crisis management that seem to work well in helping organizations diminish the potential for crisis and reduce the impact of crisis if it occurs. If we accept the arguments of Berdayes and others that key elements of organizational management include *examination, hierarchical observation, and judgment* and that these elements should be considered as possible crisis elements throughout an organization, then the first assumption we can make is that nothing in an organization is out of bounds for consideration as potential elements of crisis.

We can also make the assumption that the discourse community should be examined in its entirety. In the past, crisis management strategies tended to relate to large events that happened to an organization primarily resigned to be reactive in nature. Given the new environment in which organizations now operate, this strategy must be replaced with a more comprehensive vision of the environment that includes the entire spectrum of relationships.

Next, crisis management involves a methodology ranging from informal to formal practices. Obviously, an organization must establish methodology according to need, financial capability, size, and other factors. Viable plans include the establishment of a crisis management team that oversees a crisis strategy and assumes some level of responsibility when a crisis event occurs. More inclusive strategies include assessment of crisis issues using a crisis impact value matrix, identifying key

personnel to have responsibility during crisis events, and establishing an organization-wide set of tasks for implementation of the crisis plans.

Conclusion 4: Crisis plans include the examination of individual interaction, not only from a communications perspective but also from the standpoint of relationship building. This is an organizational communications issue, but it is also a crisis strategy recognizing that the prior reputation of an organization is heavily dependent upon relationships and previous actions. The best, most advanced product or service available is a function of both its utility and its reliability. However; it is also related to the people who support it and their relationships with those in the discourse community who interact with the organization. Whether this has to do with administration, engineering, research and design, human resources, government affairs, or media, prior relationships influence the perception of the product, service, and organization. In crisis management, many studies have shown that during a crisis, an organization is judged by the way it handles the situation, but this is strongly influenced by prior perceptions based on relationships.

Conclusion 5: Crisis plans must involve the use of technology in the implementation of crisis methodology. I have examined the use of the Internet and Intranet as an important methodology in the delivery of information and found it to be an effective tool in crisis communication. The Internet should be used not only in routine operations for messaging within the discourse community; it should also be a vital element in crisis management. Uses include messaging to and from media, archiving information on the organization and its staff, messaging in the extended

discourse community and the use of special Web sites created especially for non-routine events.

### *Closing Thoughts*

Crisis management is an evolving and complex organizational methodology. It is a hybrid methodology bringing together a number of fields including journalism, public relations, business management, communications, and advertising. It also involves many disciplines including writing and composition, and strong rhetorical elements involving persuasion, organizational structure and function, propaganda and human behavioral interactions.

Crisis management is a complex discipline because it attempts to resolve unknown future factors and unknown human reactions. Therefore, the best crisis methodology is predictive—that is, we examine issues for the future hoping to understand vulnerabilities, but never knowing for certain what lies ahead. Many authors believe that crisis management offers ineffectual outcomes because of its inherent unpredictable nature. They believe that by establishing procedure for crisis that an organization ties its hands in successfully reacting to the crisis event.

My conclusion is that theories of chaos in crisis management are helpful in considering the complexities of strategic planning, however; they are off base as a principle of management. The best crisis plans examine the issues and develop methodology based on organizational vulnerabilities. In so doing, executives are better able to deal with crisis. Moreover, the organization is improved as the discourse community is improved through this self examination.

Finally, we can adapt rhetorical principles in the analysis and implementation of crisis methodology. Many of the Greek rhetors argued that language is so powerful as to be able to essentially shift behavior in any direction through successful persuasion and skilled rhetorical tactics. Crisis management is in fact methodology to affect the behavior of people in an organization toward a more efficient discourse community. If the Greeks were correct in his assumptions on language, then at the root of crisis management and crisis communication is the ability to organize a group of individuals toward more efficiency and to persuade various subsets in the discourse community toward organizational objectives.

#### *Areas of Further Study*

The empirical needs in future research span the discipline. What are the parameters of dealing with the Internet in crisis management? What are the markets of television and the Internet relating to crisis management? What type of data can be generated relative to executive discussions with the media during a crisis? What type of tactics can be created in dealing with the proliferation of media platforms?

Organizational dynamics and methodology is also a very important element of crisis management. There is a dearth of information on organizational dynamics in the age of the Internet. How does (and can) the Internet affect an organization? Across the spectrum of management, what types of management programs can be designed using the Internet as a structural basis? As important, what type of management programs should be avoided? How can these programs be created with crisis as a fundamental consideration?

The area of crisis management I found to be the most interesting was the study of discourse communities and strategies of communication. What evidence can be generated on managing the discourse community for routine operations and during crisis? What tactics work best in dealing with the discourse community? Grunig and Grunig, Kent, Taylor, and White, and Perry, Doerful, and Taylor raise possibly the most important point in my readings relating to crisis management. This is that dialogic connectivity is a wonderful opportunity for relationship building and communication to the employees, stakeholders, and the public. Yet this connectivity is problematic and possibly extremely damaging to an organization. What data can be generated that would guide executives in this fascinating area of communication?

Finally, returning to the roots of crisis management, what is the relationship between rhetoric and crisis communication. It would seem on the surface to be a far-fetched marriage only evident in the abstract. However; as I complete this dissertation I am more convinced than at any time in my PhD programs that rhetorical fundamentals can be an impressive guiding set of principles in crisis management. How can we examine rhetorical issues and render them practical for managers? Suppose we take a lengthy list of topics in rhetoric and produce a set of crisis management goals from them. What comprises this list? How would be best contrive the relationship between the list and the applied principles? How could we best apply these principles in the marketplace?

In summary, the study of crisis management is in its infancy. Perhaps since the information platforms are forever changing, it will always be difficult to keep up. One thing is clear. The root causes of crisis will always be with us, and the changing

information landscape will be an enormous influence. Scholarly examination is needed to assist executives in understanding the countless facets of crisis management.

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## APPENDIX

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APPENDIX I: Survey Instruments

APPENDIX II: Key Words and Definitions

APPENDIX III: Personal Information

APPENDIX I: SURVEY INSTRUMENTS ON CRISIS MANAGEMENT  
FOR JOURNALISTS

1. When you learn of a “crisis” situation within a company or organization, what is the form and nature of contact to that company or organization?
2. Are you likely to contact the public relations or media director, the CEO or some other person?
3. When you acquire information from an organization going through a crisis situation, what is the method you prefer? (such as 1) direct conversation; 2) written material (releases or notes) 3) both
4. When you acquire information from an organization going through a crisis, what is the method you generally find?
5. How widespread is the method of attending a meeting/press conference in which the CEO “announces” certain information followed by a question and answer period?
6. Do you use a company or organization’s Website for gathering information about a story that is non-crisis related?
7. Do you feel most organizations handle what you might consider as a crisis in an effective manner?
8. Do you use a company or organization’s Website for gathering information about a crisis or perceived crisis situation?
9. Would you accept or prefer companies to use Websites to convey information during a crisis?

10. Do you ever find a company or organization that uses their Website to convey information during a crisis situation?
11. Would it help you in your reporting work to use information received over a Website?
12. Looking down the road a few years when the Web possibly evolves to become a platform for delivery of the type of information described here, would you see yourself shifting the way you access information? (Here I am trying to find out if veteran reporters might look to Websites for critical information, or if personal investigations will still be the way to go—perhaps a combination of the two)

FOR MANAGERS AND DIRECTORS OF CORPORATE, NON-PROFITS  
AND HIGHER EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS

1. Do you have a formal crisis management plan in your company or organization? Define a crisis management plan as a tactical and planned method of dealing with emergencies involving people, products or services in your organization.
2. If you have one, can you briefly describe the plan?
3. Do you have a crisis management team in place?
4. Who is on it?
5. Who is the leader of your crisis management team? Reportable to whom?
6. What is the process you would initiate in the event of a crisis in your company?
7. How do you currently communicate 'crisis' situations to your external community?
8. How do you report media and especially crisis media situations to your internal organizations and to your various boards of directors?
9. Do you have a company/organization spokesperson?
10. Do you have a Website?
11. Does the homepage carry links to internal news or media?
12. Does the homepage have information on it concerning your organization, or does it simply carry a series of information links?
13. Do you identify media personnel within your organization on your link?

14. Does your Website have links for the purpose of news for internal audiences or for external media distribution?
15. Does the homepage have any link that carries emergency information, such as inclement weather info, or what to do in the event of a local, state or national emergency?
16. Does your Website have a list of “experts” in your organization on subjects pertaining to your line of business?
17. Would you consider using your Website for distribution of information for the purpose of crisis communication?
18. If posted as an information link on your Website, do you think reporters or the news media would use it?
19. How would you feel about using the site if you were a reporter?
20. How often do you experience what might be considered a “crisis” in your organization?
21. What would you do if a reporter reported something hostile or false about your company?
22. What would you do if a reporter called you on the telephone and demanded a response to a potentially crisis creating situation in your company/organization?
23. In this instance, would you respond if you knew beforehand about the situation?
24. If you did not know beforehand about the situation?
25. Is “no comment” ever appropriate to a reporter?



26. Do you do 'homework' about a reporter before they interview you, crisis or no crisis?
27. Would you say that you are prepared in the event of a crisis to deal with a hostile media?
28. What weaknesses do you think your organization has in reference to crisis management?
29. Please provide additional comments if desired.

## APPENDIX II: KEY WORDS AND DEFINITIONS

1. Bunker mentality—usually a negative term referring to a CEO who chooses to avoid dealing with crisis management plans or, when a crisis occurs, allowing a crisis management team to manage the situation.
2. Chief spokesperson—the person assigned by the CEO and the crisis management team to speak for the company or organization. Usually this person is the chief public relations officer or the media director.
3. Copy—typically used as a journalism term reflecting the written word from a reporter or writer. Usually refers to the “copy” in a news column, magazine or reporter’s journal used in the media.
4. Crisis forecasting—a correlation or a formula that considers the crisis impact value and a probability factor. Involves crisis planning and what if scenarios on certain factors within a company or organization
5. Crisis impact value—a formula correlating topics within an organization with probability of crisis occurrence (Crisis Impact Value=Crisis Intensity/Probability)
6. Crisis intensity value—a formula assessing the relative strength of a set of possible “hot spots” in an organization. These hot spots are determined by a crisis management team and may consist of one or more potential crisis issues.
7. Crisis management plans—a formal written document that establishes a plan of action in dealing with stated crisis scenarios

8. Crisis management team—a group of people assigned by the CEO that meets regularly in a corporate or organizational setting to establish crisis management plans, conduct crisis forecasting and to oversee the implementation of a crisis management plan in the event of a crisis.
9. Crisis management strategy—a plan that assesses certain weaknesses and strengths in a company, outlines steps to negate or diminish the potential for a crisis, and enumerates ideas to mitigate given crisis scenarios.
10. Chronicling a crisis—a function of the crisis management team to keep assiduous notes on the happenings, conversations and issues during the course of a crisis. This is important as a means of understanding what went well and what went poorly. Usually considered during the crisis recovery stage and the information gathering stage.
11. Discourse community—An affiliated network of individuals and organizations connected through communication. A discourse community has the following attributes:
  - a. A broadly agreed set of common public goals
  - b. Mechanisms of intercommunication among its members
  - c. Uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback
  - d. Utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative utterance of its aims
  - e. Has acquired some specific lexis (specialized terminology, acronyms)
  - f. Has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant

- g. Has content and discursual expertise (Swales 1990).
12. Hostile press—especially during a “media heavy crisis,” a press whose intent is to be aggressive and unsympathetic to the situation at hand. Usually a hostile press will slant media with copy that is counterproductive to the well being of a company or organization.
13. Interactive Web—Web use that has a live person.
14. Media pitch—a type of messaging typically from a media division of an organization used to explain actions or provide information about an organization, its people or its policy to external sources.
15. Responsive or Reactive Web—Web use that allows user to send information to a person or organization. It is not interactive in the sense that there is a live person responding on the other end of the communication.
16. Somatic—in organizational dynamics, the structural foundation, or the intrinsic underpinning that not only hold the organization together, but also helps to form its character.
17. Stages of crises (in order of occurrence):
- a. Prodromal—the stage of crisis development in which the signs of a crisis are evident
  - b. Acute—the crisis reaches the stage of no return and the organization or company is being negatively impacted by internal or external forces.
  - c. Chronic Resolution—the acute stage is on the downswing, and either corporate crisis strategies are being effectively implemented or the

external forces are simply wearing out (perhaps the media is getting tired of running the story).

18. Stakeholder—an individual or group that has an affiliation to an organization. These may include shareholders, trustees, employees, the media, even activist groups that either support or oppose an organization. A stakeholder in general has some affiliation or tie with an organization and is interested in its success or failure. Center and Jackson refer to stakeholders as, “Groups of people who should care and be involved because the subject could or will affect them” (255). The authors mention the following as possible stakeholders: employees, shareholders, customers, the community, though they do not limit all stakeholders to these groups (250). Coombs defines stakeholders as “Any person or group that has an interest, right, claim or ownership in an organization. Stakeholders have been separated into two distinct groups: primary and secondary. Primary stakeholders are those people or groups whose actions can be harmful or beneficial to an organization. Failure to maintain a continuing interaction with a primary stakeholder could result in the failure of the organization. Typical primary stakeholders include employees, investors, customers, suppliers, and the government. Secondary stakeholders or influencers are those people or groups who can affect or be affected by the actions of an organization. Typical influencers include the media, activist groups, and competitors. Influencers cannot stop an organization from functioning but still can damage an organization” (20).

19. Transparency--Transparency in journalism is a relatively new term reflecting the reader's ability to extract accountability of what is written. In viewing documents on the Internet, users may follow embedded referenced links to their own person levels of satisfaction. Writers and journalists, by using embedded links may write copy on Internet pages and provide citations for accountability.
20. Warrior Mentality—The tendency for employees to step out front in an organization to provide information to the media on a crisis situation, or to point fingers at other employees or the administration of an organization.
21. Web Platform—A term used to describe the Internet's use in communication. It is associated with a platform in which things are located and in which they are delivered to various locations off the platform.

## APPENDIX III: PERSONAL INFORMATION

Gordon A. Harrison  
Biographical Summary*Education*

BS Microbiology	University of South Florida
BA English Literature	
Minor: 16 <sup>th</sup> Century Literature	University of South Florida
MA Professional Writing	Kennesaw State University
Subtopic: International Localization	
PhD Candidate in Rhetoric & Composition	Georgia State University
Topic: Crisis Management and Communication	
Subtopic: Use of the Web as a Delivery Platform for Crisis Communication	

*Professional Positions*Vice President for Advancement, Georgia Gwinnett College

Previously part of management team assisting in the transition from university center status to state-funded college. Currently assigned as Vice President responsible for creating and overseeing an advancement department at the new college, including fundraising, media, publications, and government affairs.

Executive-in-Residence and Chief Administrative Officer  
Georgia House of Representatives

Responsible for overhauling House of Representatives administrative, personnel, communication, media, and Web systems. Liaison to Capitol press corps. As part of senior staff, and on loan from the Regents, developed media strategies for House leadership and members.

Kennesaw State University

Various cabinet-level posts at KSU, including IVP for Advancement, AVP for External Affairs, Sr. Advisor to the President, Chief Communications Officer

Sr. VP for Government/International Affairs/Omni Resource Group, Inc.

Responsibilities included managing Fortune 500 corporate accounts; creating and managing international division; managing business development and contracts.

CEO of World Technology Institute (WTC)/Board of Regents

Founded WTC as an Institute under the Board of Regents of Georgia. Managed Institute to assist Georgia corporations with international market penetration. Opened affiliated offices in Miami, Florida and Beijing PRC.

Coordinator of Federal/State Affairs Office/Governor George Busbee

Governor's liaison to Congress, the White House, Federal agencies and other states. Also, special projects manager for the Governor, and liaison to higher education in Georgia.

Biologist/Florida Game & Freshwater Fish Commission

Responsible for environmental examination of sites proposed for development in North Florida.

Consultant to Presidential Campaign, Several Congressional Campaigns, Governor's Campaign

Other Professional Highlights

- Presenter at Oxford Business Roundtable; Oxford College, Oxford England
- Lecturer on crisis management for the Carl Vinson Institute's Chinese Programs/Beijing
- Several trips to Europe as part of team of U.S. Delegates for examination of EU issues
- Raised over \$2M in state/private \$ for Southern Center for International Studies
- Under Governor George Busbee, headed team to conceptualize and implement the Advanced Technology Development Center at Georgia Tech
- Under Busbee, appointed as nation's youngest Science Advisor to the Governor
- Staff co-director of the Federal Intergovernmental Science, Engineering and Technology Advisory Panel to the President's Science Advisor

Married to Frances

Five children. Jessica, Amy, Katherine, Kristin, and Harry