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What Are The Components Of Developing An Efficacious Crisis Management Plan?

Joette M. McGill

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WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF DEVELOPING AN EFFICACIOUS CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN?

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Abstract

Key words: Crisis Management, Crisis Communications, Prodrome, Crisis Prevention, Crisis Planning, Crisis Management Team.

Crisis Management is becoming a familiar part of corporate business. A crisis can happen to any organization and unfortunately most organizations do not have a plan incase one occurs. Assisting businesses to first understand that they must plan for a crisis is difficult. Like any other life-changing situation, everyone always thinks, it will never happen to us. Unfortunately, it will and the best thing to do is be prepared.

The most important aspect of crisis management is avoiding the crisis all together. With the proper tools, people, and dedication, this can be done. For instance, an organization must know what crisis could happen at their place of business. If a business can admit what crisis have a possibility of happening, they can begin to take steps to avoid those crisis and even ones they may have not thought of.

Of course, it is possible that an organization plans for a crisis and it does happen. If a crisis does occur, the organization will be prepared to handle it. From start to finish, a crisis can be used to the advantage of an organization. Not one organization is protected from crisis but what the organization does to avoid and handle a crisis can be a matter of life and death for the organization.

Lastly, after a crisis happens, the organization must take what happened and learn from it. This research will assist an organization in developing its own plan to prevent, handle, and learn from a crisis once it has occurred.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all who made this thesis possible. First and foremost, to Dr. Donald Lombardi who took the time and always had the perfect words of encouragement to keep me going. Thank you. Also, to my family who had to put up with me while I worked for another degree. And of course to Frank Rosato. Thank you all for the encouragement, support, and patience through these last three years.
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

“A crisis is a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name. It interrupts normal business transactions and can sometimes threaten the existence of an organization” (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.1). Many industries, companies, and people do not believe a crisis can happen at their place of business. This cannot be further from the truth. Crisis can range from a tornado that demolishes a company’s headquarters to the tampering of a product or even a CEO who embezzles money. The list of crisis can go on and on and businesses need to progress with a “heads up” approach. They should be aware and ready that a crisis can occur at any time and will occur at the worst possible time.

There are many crises, which occurred that companies were not prepared for. Most likely, these companies never thought that a certain type of crisis could ever happen to them. Did Exxon ever think that an oil tanker, with a Captain who had made that run more then 100 times, would run aground and leak 11 million gallons of oil into the Prince William Sound? On August 1, 1966, did the University of Texas, Austin, ever think that a lone sniper would mount a tower on campus and fire a gun until 14 were dead? Now we think, sure that can happen but do we ever think that it will happen where we are? The answer is no.

Many times, we remember crises when human lives are taken away, although not in every crisis are lives lost. In most cases, for example, the public does not consider a
plane crash a crisis but it’s considered a disaster. For the company it will be considered a crisis. Many people can recall the flight number of an airline when it crashes or where an airline was going when it was hijacked. This is most likely because there were many lives lost or because the crisis affected many people in a personal way.

Airlines fortunately, never seemed as if they were prone to mishaps. We are safer flying than driving a car, right? In current times, it seems as if there is nowhere that is completely safe. That may be true but any place can take precautions to detect and even prevent any catastrophes from happening.

In lieu of the recent attack on the United States, it seems proper to address the topic of crises and crisis management. Terrorism is the “the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological” (http://isuisse.ifrance.com/emmaf/base/baster.htm). In light of the recent terrorist attacks in the United States, Americans are too familiar with what terrorism is all about. Living in a country that honors democracy, the United States will always be under scrutiny from other countries that do not believe in the same ideals.

Using airlines as examples, the need for every airline to have a crisis management plan is essential. Without one, a company can be left with nothing after a crisis occurs. There are many crises that can and will occur but terrorism is one that most airlines think, “won’t happen to us.” As a functioning company, the players must develop crisis management plans with the mindset; expect the worst, because it will happen.

The crisis management plan will assist an organization with surviving the current, during, and after-effects of a crisis. “Remember that the outcome of a crisis affects the
lives and the jobs of innocent people-people who are totally dependent on the skills of
management to see them and their families through the crisis, to enable them to continue
to put bread on their tables" (Fink, 2000, p. 54).

Research Question

Not until recently, has the public been more aware of the possibility of disasters
or crisis. When there is a crisis occurring or there is a possibility that a crisis can occur at
a company, what are the essential elements of an efficacious crisis management plan?
This analysis will discuss the ways to develop and manage an effective crisis
management plan, before, during, and after a crisis has occurred.

Subsidiary Questions

In order to effectively develop a crisis management plan and assist with the
understanding of managing one, the author will additionally answer the following
questions:

1. Can a company determine what crisis may occur if they have never had any?

2. What steps can be taken before a crisis to lessen the negative effects after a crisis
   occurs?

3. Do employees of organizations believe their organization is prepared for a crisis?

4. Is there a certain spokesperson that should be visible and communicating with the
   public before and after a crisis?

5. Have organizations effectively managed a crisis? And have crisis plans benefited
   the outcome?
6. How does an organization communicate effectively to its publics after a crisis?
7. Can a company determine what their most important publics are after a crisis?
8. Is there a specific outline for a crisis management plan?
9. Is it possible for a company to have a positive reputation following a crisis?

Purpose of the Study

Every existing company should have a crisis plan they can refer to when a crisis occurs. Fortunately, most businesses can prevent and deal with a crisis on their own. However, it is also possible for one organization to have a crisis and it will spread to other organizations. There are an incredible amount of crisis, which an organization can have and to deter these crises, companies must work with all stakeholders, media, employees, and even surrounding areas in which the company is located. In all cases of crisis management, all involved agencies must work together to handle, prevent, and take control of potential and occurring crises.

Since people seem to recall airline crises more than other crisis, the author will use the airlines, for an example. Throughout the history of the airline industry, there has been proof of many companies that have handled a crisis well and others that had not. For example, after an airline accident, the company may keep the public well informed about the progress of the investigation but the company may not keep the families of the deceased informed and this can lead to a bad post-crisis situation that can ultimately destroy a company. After the crash of Pan American World Airways Flight 103, some families reported Pan Am did not officially notify the families about the death of a loved one until weeks after the crash. Some even said they learned about their loved one’s death from the television (Ray, 1999, p.194). As said by Deppa, 1994 in Ray, “The airline was
portrayed as a cold corporate entity who lacked sensitivity and compassion where families were concerned and was basically negligent” (p.194).

Tragedies that span from TWA Flight 800 to ValuJet Flight 592 and especially Pan Am Flight 103 were and should have been prodromes to other airlines. Prevention is the best cure for a crisis says Fern-Banks (1996, p. 64). This is not only true in the airline industry but in all industries. Think the unthinkable and that is what a company must plan for.

The purpose of the study is to develop steps to execute an effective crisis management plan for an unspecified organization. Being prepared is the first step in battling a crisis. As we can see from past crisis, some businesses were not ready for a real crisis to occur. Any company must be sure what a crisis is and know that the inevitable will happen. First, this plan will assist an organization before a crisis occurs by implementing measures that will decrease the likelihood of a crisis happening. Construction of an entire detailed plan is part of handling a crisis but for execution of this project, the author will concentrate on how to develop and handle each part of a crisis.

Next, when a crisis does happen, what are the correct moves to make? In the example of an airline, should the company fly families to a central location? Who should be the spokesperson for the organization? If there were no casualties, is the occurrence a true crisis? What can a company let the public know? Should the public know everything and what time is right to release certain information? These questions should be answered prior to a crisis but are executed while a crisis is unfolding. These may seem like simple questions to some but there is proof that many companies do not find the answers so easily.
Lastly, this plan will aid a company after a crisis occurs and decrease the possibilities of negatives that can follow a crisis. A company must concentrate on what they leaned from the crisis and what they can do better next time. In every company, there is always room for improvement and this is the time to improve.

We are currently observing an economy, which has been affected by the terrorist attacks of 2001. There are currently certain organizations who are feeling the brunt of the attacks but this just exemplifies how important an effective and suitable plan will assist any organization in a crisis. Any industry should plan for a crisis. Because of the recent crisis, it could be hypothesized that the airlines were not prepared for this type of crisis and if they had a specific crisis management plan, maybe they would have been better prepared.

The author will focus on how to assemble a useful crisis management plan and how to carry it out in the most effective way.

**Objectives**

The initial objective of this study is to develop steps, which create the most effective crisis management plan. The author will also concentrate on the process of deciding what types of crises could plague companies and steps to be taken to fully avoid a crisis in the first place.

The secondary objective will be to create steps that companies could use when the crisis actually occurs. One that is understandable yet comprehensive and can be executed with perfection.
In addition, the steps on how to develop this plan will be the prime focus. A company can actually plan on what types of crisis's can occur at the company. The author will focus mainly on terrorism but crisis management plans should be able to be used across the board for more then one type of crisis.

Definition of Terms

1. **Crisis**: “A major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name” (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.1).

2. **Prodrome**: A warning symptom indicating the onset of a disease.

3. **Crisis Management**: “The process of strategic planning for a crisis or negative turning point, a process that removes some of the risk and uncertainty from the negative occurrence and thereby allows the organization to be in greater control of its own destiny” (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.2).

4. **Crisis Management Team (CMT)**: “A small group of people assembled in a business responsible for helping to plan for and manage a crisis” (Caponigro, 2000, p. 273).

5. **Publics**: “Individuals or groups of people or organizations with similar characteristics that are important to the success of your business” (Caponigro, 2000, p. 274).

6. **Spokesperson**: “The person who represents your organization and answers questions from the news media and others. Depending on the nature of the crisis, this could be one or more of the following: the company’s owner, the chief
executive officer, a plant manager, a department director, a public relations representative, an attorney, a marketing representative, or another company executive" (Caponigro, 2000, p. 274).

Limitations

This study is somewhat limited because there and hundreds of industries and millions of companies that would benefit from a tailored crisis plan. In this case, a general plan will be of great assistance but a customized plan would of course be superior. This plan will not be specific to one industry or one company.

Many people who would have been helpful in assisting with this study were not easily accessible to speak with the author; i.e.: Presidents and public relations people.

Also, to view a crisis plan for any organization is difficult or close to impossible. This would have been beneficial for the author to compare and contrast different plans to see what works best and what needed or needs improvement.
Chapter II

The Five Stages of a Crisis

A Boeing 767 has crashed in a remote location killing all of its passengers. Is the carrier ready to handle the onslaught of media, families, and authorities that are about to descend on the company? Or maybe a renowned fundraising organization has just discovered that the president embezzled money. Is that company ready for what lies ahead? Most companies would say, sure they are ready. They have a great public relations team. Surprise, this is not the only part of the company, which is going to be affected. Nor, will it be the only part of the company, which is going to be in the spotlight. That is just an example of one incorrect assumption an organization can make during a crisis. The initial part of handling a crisis effectively is to understand that a crisis can be broken down into stages. Within these stages, there are different steps and procedures to deal with the crisis so the company will emerge with improved or equal integrity and a better or equal reputation than it had before.

Detection

Would many say a crisis is unexpected? Yes, of course. But the real answer is, no not really. A crisis is only unexpected if the company did not do its crisis planning. The first stage of a crisis is detection (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p. 4). Can a company detect a crisis even though it has not happened? Yes. There are two ways in which to detect a crisis.

Prodromes

Many crisis experts use the word prodrome. A prodrome is said to be a warning sign or a precursor (Merriam Webster’s Dictionary, 1993, p. 930) For example, when two
planes were hijacked and flown into the World Trade Towers, this was a prodrome for other airlines and also property holders or managers of taller buildings. No one ever thought that something of that magnitude would ever happen. But it did. In this case, there were never any prodromes from which to draw from. But there is no contest in this case that there was a possibility it could happen. And it did.

The point cannot be made enough that companies need to plan and look for potential crisis all the time. Case in point; Tylenol. As Fearn-Banks (1996) illustrates, “The 1982 Tylenol tampering case was a prodrome to other manufacturers of over-the-counter drugs. Most companies heeded the warning and now use tamper-proof containers. Imagine how many crisis were avoided by noticing that what happened to Tylenol could happen to other companies” (p. 4). In this case, Johnson and Johnson did not have a prodrome but other companies who did market the same products did.

On the other hand, Johnson and Johnson did not need a warning. If the company had done any type of crisis planning, product tampering would be high on the list with possibility and probability of occurring. It seems obvious now that they should have made the containers tamper-proof. One terrific example of a crisis that could have been prevented or lessened was the Titanic. Without getting into logistics, we will touch on the fact that there were not enough lifeboats. There is always a chance that a boat will collide with another object, right? And then there is a chance that the ship will sink. The boat was deemed unsinkable, which seems a bit peculiar but just to be safe, there should have been enough lifeboats. And not just for that reason should there have been enough boats. What if the motors ceased to operate for some reason and they couldn’t get a signal to another boat that they were stranded? At least they would have had a way to try and get
passengers to land. If the developers of the ship had done their crisis planning, there may have been enough boats and to this day, we may have never heard about the Titanic. This is why planning is a very important part of dealing with crisis (Ray, 1999, p. 43).

**Crisis Inventory**

An additional way to detect a crisis is to simply make a list of crisis that a company could possibly experience. Authors such as, Kathleen Fearn-Banks, Steven Fink, Ian Mitroff, and many others, refer to this process as a crisis inventory, audits, or forecasting. This is essentially the first step in creating a crisis management plan (CMP). What one needs to realize first, is that every little thing that goes wrong on a day-to-day basis is not a crisis. There are specific criteria that define a crisis. First, a crisis is an incident that may negatively impact an organization's reputation. Second, it is an incident that interrupts normal business transactions; closing of a school, business, roads, bridges, or even removing a product from the shelves. Third, a crisis may cause employees, stakeholders, donors, etc. to distance themselves from the organization. Lastly, a crisis ultimately threatens the existence of an organization (Grider, 2001). These guidelines apply to all organizations, big or small, local or international.

**Crisis Criteria**

Having guidelines for defining a crisis can make the inventory process run smoother. Let's use an air carrier for an example. Use this as a brainstorming session. Think of anything, which can occur that would lead to any of the above “crisis criteria.” Terrorism, fire, boycott, merger, layoff’s, reorganization, and explosions are just a few
types of crisis that can plague an organization. Remember to think critically. Is workplace violence possible here? Yes. Can the president embezzle money? These are all potential crisis. As one can see, there are many which we don’t even think of so that is why we must plan ahead and realize what can happen before it paralyzes a company (Grider, 2000).

In Steven Fink’s book, “Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable”, he discusses his view of crisis forecasting. There are many differentiating ways to carry out this process but Fink developed what he calls, a Crisis Impact Value. His scale, ranging from zero to ten will exemplify in a solid number the fatality or non-fatality that a potential crisis can bring to an organization (Fink, 2000, p. 41). Other authors such as Ian Mitroff, Kathleen Fearn-Banks, and Jeffrey Caponigro, to name a few, also have ways to conduct a crisis inventory and each company needs to assess which they would prefer. The following chart, is an example of Fink’s Crisis Impact Scale which he suggests to use when attempting crisis forecasting (Fink, 2000).

II. 1 – Crisis Impact Scale

Score from 0 (lowest) to 10 (highest) the extent to which a potential crisis would:

1. Escalate in intensity.
2. Fall under close media or government scrutiny.
3. Interfere with the normal operations of business.
4. Jeopardize a positive public image.
5. Damage a company’s bottom line.
Domino Effect

Just to point out, in the case of airline carriers, we can say that it is a very independent industry and one organization's crisis can easily result in a crisis for industry stakeholders. Therefore, the better prepared each industry group is to handle a crisis, the easier it is for the entire industry to survive the crisis (Ray, 1999 p.89). Many individuals at a company do not understand that a crisis at their place of employment can mean a crisis for the entire industry. When Enron closed its doors in 2001, its auditing firm, Arthur Andersen was under much scrutiny. In the December 24 issue of Business Week, new CEO Joseph F. Berardino was stated as telling congress that the firm was “wrong” on one Enron auditing decision (p. 30). This one wrong decision already has Andersen going through its own crisis but it could also have a positive or negative effect on the entire accounting/auditing industry.

Because of Anderson’s “wrong” decision they will most likely loose some business as they already have because of other “wrong” decisions, which would give other companies opportunities to seize new clients. Or the industry may suffer. There is also a slight possibility that other companies who perform the same services as Anderson will be under scrutiny. Maybe they will be audited or potential clients will scrutinize past performance, making sure there were no bad decisions made. In the long run, Andersen should have never let this illegal activity progress to what it did. Who would have ever thought that one company’s bankruptcy would showcase another company in the spotlight?

Although it is quite obvious that no matter what type of business one is employed, a crisis plan or crisis manual is as important as having benefits for employees, and
believe it or not, not all business have one. But this does not mean that a company cannot exercise other methods of crisis planning.

Prevention / Preparation

Prevention and preparation are two terms, which go hand in hand. As Ian Mitroff and Gus Anagnos (2001) state, “Even with the best frameworks and the best of preparations, it is unfortunately still the case that not all crisis can be prevented. This even holds true for those crisis that we know with almost complete certainty will occur” (p.6). This leads us to the topic of crisis prevention. There can be many tips and lessons to be learned while practicing crisis prevention. Jeffrey R. Caponigro, CEO of Caponigro Public Relations, in Michigan uses superb examples to show how a crisis could have been prevented and how it escalated. An elderly man at a bank becomes disruptive while waiting in a long line. This is a bank, which serves many elderly customers and has had no previous history of discrimination against the elderly. After the man becomes extremely disturbing the branch manager kindly asks the man to leave. The man refuses and the manager has security escort him out. Two months later the manager receives a call from the banks legal counsel stating the branch was being sued for age discrimination. Could this be possible? There was a lack of ramps to enter the building, small type on brochures and bank forms, and rock and roll music was played. Imagine being the branch manager and having to take all of this in. The elderly man was going to campaign to get the senior citizens to boycott the bank. And the elderly make up a great number of their customers (Caponigro, 2000, pp. 9-10).

There are lessons to be learned here. Sure, who would have ever though that the lack of ramps, music, and brochures would intertwine with a lawsuit? Not many people
but that is all part of crisis prevention. In a crisis inventory, being sued for age
discrimination should have been high on the list if many customers are senior citizens.
Also, if there are not many ramps this should have been taken care of previously. Small
print in brochures should have been fixed because most likely it was small enough to be
difficult for anyone to read (Caponigro, 2000, p.10). These small things could have easily
been taken care of and produced a weak case against the bank or no case at all.

**Relationships**

Another mechanism for prevention is the many relationships that a business
according to stakeholders’ perceptions. “The ‘Stakeholder’ refers to any group or public
impacted by the organizations operation; employees, consumers, stockholders, suppliers,
competitors, unions, special interest groups, government, media, and the local
community” (pp. 15-16). In preventative crisis measures, it is generally a good idea to
make sure employees of the company know first, who the key stakeholders are.
Additionally, employees should be aware of other groups that the company would want
to foster good relations with incase a crisis was to occur. These relationships can be the
media and even the surrounding community in which the company is located. In the
previous example of the bank, good relations with other customers would have given the
bank an upper hand if there ever was a trial.
Reputation

"Nothing is more important than your reputation, credibility, and trust" (Caponigro, 2000, p.83). If a business has a good reputation, most likely they have good relations with their key publics including those groups that may not be directly involved with the everyday running of the company. When the company Arthur Andersen is mentioned, do we think of good reputation, credibility, and trust? If this company had a great reputation prior to the Enron collapse, would many of their clients be leaving? The reputation, credibility, and trust are gone; for now anyway.

A positive reputation is going to assist an organization even if they never have a crisis. But, as Sally J. Ray (1999) says, “When determining strategic communication options to defend corporate image during a crisis, the organization’s performance history as well as its perceived image before the crisis must be considered” (p.70). “More specifically, an organization’s believability is derived from it’s credibility”(Ray, 1999, p70). Most will agree that a corporation with an exceptional reputation prior to a crisis will do better when a crisis occurs than a company with a terrible reputation.

Signals

When Enron fell, there were prodromes that could have assisted the company pre-crisis. Other companies have gone through this and they should have heeded the warning that it could have happened to them. In addition, there is another type of pre-crisis detection that is part of preventing a crisis and those are signals (Mitroff and Anagnos, 2001, p.102). “Prior to actual occurrence, all crisis send out a repeated train of early warning signals. If these signals can be picked up, amplified, and acted upon, then many
crisis can be averted before they happen. True, in many cases, the signals are weak and filled with noise. Nonetheless, it usually turns out that there is at least one person in every organization who knows about an impending crisis” (Mitroff and Anagnos, 2001, p.102).

To assist in understanding the importance of signals, the author will take an excerpt from the book, *Managing Crisis Before They Happen*, regarding the Space Shuttle Challenger.

The Presidential Commission Report into the causes of the accident found in no uncertain terms that the technical cause was the faulty O-ring design. However, even more serious was a faulty organization that prevented those who had serious doubts about the adequacy of the design from being heard. In effect, their voices and concerns were prevented from getting to the top of the organization.

The Appendix to the Presidential Commission Report contains an “audit” of a string of memos that failed to make it from the bowels of the organization to the top. One of the most revealing memos begins with the painful cry “Help!” In no uncertain terms, the memo says that if the space shuttle continues to fly with the current design, then a disaster is virtually guaranteed to happen (Mitroff and Anagnos, 2001, pp.102-103).

“One of the most important findings in CM is that with very few exceptions, crisis send out a trail of early warning signals before their actual occurrence” (Ibid, as cited by Mitroff, Pearson, and Harrington, 1996, p.47). “If such signals can be detected, many crisis can be prevented from occurring-the best possible form of CM”(Mitroff et al.,
lives and the jobs of innocent people-people who are totally dependent on the skills of management to see them and their families through the crisis, to enable them to continue to put bread on their tables" (Fink, 2000, p. 54).

**Research Question**

Not until recently, has the public been more aware of the possibility of disasters or crisis. When there is a crisis occurring or there is a possibility that a crisis can occur at a company, what are the essential elements of an efficacious crisis management plan?

This analysis will discuss the ways to develop and manage an effective crisis management plan, before, during, and after a crisis has occurred.

**Subsidiary Questions**

In order to effectively develop a crisis management plan and assist with the understanding of managing one, the author will additionally answer the following questions:

1. Can a company determine what crisis may occur if they have never had any?
2. What steps can be taken before a crisis to lessen the negative effects after a crisis occurs?
3. Do employees of organizations believe their organization is prepared for a crisis?
4. Is there a certain spokesperson that should be visible and communicating with the public before and after a crisis?
5. Have organizations effectively managed a crisis? And have crisis plans benefited the outcome?
6. How does an organization communicate effectively to its publics after a crisis?

7. Can a company determine what their most important publics are after a crisis?

8. Is there a specific outline for a crisis management plan?

9. Is it possible for a company to have a positive reputation following a crisis?

**Purpose of the Study**

Every existing company should have a crisis plan they can refer to when a crisis occurs. Fortunately, most businesses can prevent and deal with a crisis on their own. However, it is also possible for one organization to have a crisis and it will spread to other organizations. There are an incredible amount of crises, which an organization can have and to deter these crises, companies must work with all stakeholders, media, employees, and even surrounding areas in which the company is located. In all cases of crisis management, all involved agencies must work together to handle, prevent, and take control of potential and occurring crises.

Since people seem to recall airline crises more than other crises, the author will use the airlines, for an example. Throughout the history of the airline industry, there has been proof of many companies that have handled a crisis well and others that had not. For example, after an airline accident, the company may keep the public well informed about the progress of the investigation but the company may not keep the families of the deceased informed and this can lead to a bad post-crisis situation that can ultimately destroy a company. After the crash of Pan American World Airways Flight 103, some families reported Pan Am did not officially notify the families about the death of a loved one until weeks after the crash. Some even said they learned about their loved one’s death from the television (Ray, 1999, p.194). As said by Deppa, 1994 in Ray, “The airline was
portrayed as a cold corporate entity who lacked sensitivity and compassion where families were concerned and was basically negligent” (p.194).

Tragedies that span from TWA Flight 800 to ValuJet Flight 592 and especially Pan Am Flight 103 were and should have been prodromes to other airlines. Prevention is the best cure for a crisis says Fern-Banks (1996, p. 64). This is not only true in the airline industry but in all industries. Think the unthinkable and that is what a company must plan for.

The purpose of the study is to develop steps to execute an effective crisis management plan for an unspecified organization. Being prepared is the first step in battling a crisis. As we can see from past crisis, some businesses were not ready for a real crisis to occur. Any company must be sure what a crisis is and know that the inevitable will happen. First, this plan will assist an organization before a crisis occurs by implementing measures that will decrease the likelihood of a crisis happening. Construction of an entire detailed plan is part of handling a crisis but for execution of this project, the author will concentrate on how to develop and handle each part of a crisis.

Next, when a crisis does happen, what are the correct moves to make? In the example of an airline, should the company fly families to a central location? Who should be the spokesperson for the organization? If there were no casualties, is the occurrence a true crisis? What can a company let the public know? Should the public know everything and what time is right to release certain information? These questions should be answered prior to a crisis but are executed while a crisis is unfolding. These may seem like simple questions to some but there is proof that many companies do not find the answers so easily.
Lastly, this plan will aid a company after a crisis occurs and decrease the possibilities of negatives that can follow a crisis. A company must concentrate on what they learned from the crisis and what they can do better next time. In every company, there is always room for improvement and this is the time to improve.

We are currently observing an economy, which has been affected by the terrorist attacks of 2001. There are currently certain organizations who are feeling the brunt of the attacks but this just exemplifies how important an effective and suitable plan will assist any organization in a crisis. Any industry should plan for a crisis. Because of the recent crisis, it could be hypothesized that the airlines were not prepared for this type of crisis and if they had a specific crisis management plan, maybe they would have been better prepared.

The author will focus on how to assemble a useful crisis management plan and how to carry it out in the most effective way.

**Objectives**

The initial objective of this study is to develop steps, which create the most effective crisis management plan. The author will also concentrate on the process of deciding what types of crises could plague companies and steps to be taken to fully avoid a crisis in the first place.

The secondary objective will be to create steps that companies could use when the crisis actually occurs. One that is understandable yet comprehensive and can be executed with perfection.
In addition, the steps on how to develop this plan will be the prime focus. A company can actually plan on what types of crisis’s can occur at the company. The author will focus mainly on terrorism but crisis management plans should be able to be used across the board for more then one type of crisis.

Definition of Terms

1. **Crisis**: “A major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name” (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.1).

2. **Prodrome**: A warning symptom indicating the onset of a disease.

3. **Crisis Management**: “The process of strategic planning for a crisis or negative turning point, a process that removes some of the risk and uncertainty from the negative occurrence and thereby allows the organization to be in greater control of its own destiny” (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.2).

4. **Crisis Management Team (CMT)**: “A small group of people assembled in a business responsible for helping to plan for and manage a crisis” (Caponigro, 2000, p. 273).

5. **Publics**: “Individuals or groups of people or organizations with similar characteristics that are important to the success of your business” (Caponigro, 2000, p. 274).

6. **Spokesperson**: “The person who represents your organization and answers questions from the news media and others. Depending on the nature of the crisis, this could be one or more of the following: the company’s owner, the chief
executive officer, a plant manager, a department director, a public relations representative, an attorney, a marketing representative, or another company executive” (Caponigro, 2000, p. 274).

Limitations

This study is somewhat limited because there are hundreds of industries and millions of companies that would benefit from a tailored crisis plan. In this case, a general plan will be of great assistance but a customized plan would of course be superior. This plan will not be specific to one industry or one company. Many people who would have been helpful in assisting with this study were not easily accessible to speak with the author; i.e.: Presidents and public relations people.

Also, to view a crisis plan for any organization is difficult or close to impossible. This would have been beneficial for the author to compare and contrast different plans to see what works best and what needed or needs improvement.
Chapter II

The Five Stages of a Crisis

A Boeing 767 has crashed in a remote location killing all of its passengers. Is the carrier ready to handle the onslaught of media, families, and authorities that are about to descend on the company? Or maybe a renowned fundraising organization has just discovered that the president embezzled money. Is that company ready for what lies ahead? Most companies would say, sure they are ready. They have a great public relations team. Surprise, this is not the only part of the company, which is going to be affected. Nor, will it be the only part of the company, which is going to be in the spotlight. That is just an example of one incorrect assumption an organization can make during a crisis. The initial part of handling a crisis effectively is to understand that a crisis can be broken down into stages. Within these stages, there are different steps and procedures to deal with the crisis so the company will emerge with improved or equal integrity and a better or equal reputation than it had before.

Detection

Would many say a crisis is unexpected? Yes, of course. But the real answer is, no not really. A crisis is only unexpected if the company did not do its crisis planning. The first stage of a crisis is detection (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p. 4). Can a company detect a crisis even though it has not happened? Yes. There are two ways in which to detect a crisis.

Prodromes

Many crisis experts use the word prodrome. A prodrome is said to be a warning sign or a precursor (Merriam Webster’s Dictionary, 1993, p. 930) For example, when two
planes were hijacked and flown into the World Trade Towers, this was a prodrome for other airlines and also property holders or managers of taller buildings. No one ever thought that something of that magnitude would ever happen. But it did. In this case, there were never any prodromes from which to draw from. But there is no contest in this case that there was a possibility it could happen. And it did.

The point cannot be made enough that companies need to plan and look for potential crisis all the time. Case in point; Tylenol. As Fearn-Banks (1996) illustrates, "The 1982 Tylenol tampering case was a prodrome to other manufacturers of over-the-counter drugs. Most companies heeded the warning and now use tamper-proof containers. Imagine how many crisis were avoided by noticing that what happened to Tylenol could happen to other companies" (p. 4). In this case, Johnson and Johnson did not have a prodrome but other companies who did market the same products did.

On the other hand, Johnson and Johnson did not need a warning. If the company had done any type of crisis planning, product tampering would be high on the list with possibility and probability of occurring. It seems obvious now that they should have made the containers tamper-proof. One terrific example of a crisis that could have been prevented or lessened was the Titanic. Without getting into logistics, we will touch on the fact that there were not enough lifeboats. There is always a chance that a boat will collide with another object, right? And then there is a chance that the ship will sink. The boat was deemed unsinkable, which seems a bit peculiar but just to be safe, there should have been enough lifeboats. And not just for that reason should there have been enough boats. What if the motors ceased to operate for some reason and they couldn't get a signal to another boat that they were stranded? At least they would have had a way to try and get
passengers to land. If the developers of the ship had done their crisis planning, there may have been enough boats and to this day, we may have never heard about the Titanic. This is why planning is a very important part of dealing with crisis (Ray, 1999, p. 43).

Crisis Inventory

An additional way to detect a crisis is to simply make a list of crisis that a company could possibly experience. Authors such as, Kathleen Fearn-Banks, Steven Fink, Ian Mitroff, and many others, refer to this process as a crisis inventory, audits, or forecasting. This is essentially the first step in creating a crisis management plan (CMP). What one needs to realize first, is that every little thing that goes wrong on a day-to-day basis is not a crisis. There are specific criteria that define a crisis. First, a crisis is an incident that may negatively impact an organizations reputation. Second, it is an incident that interrupts normal business transactions; closing of a school, business, roads, bridges, or even removing a product from the shelves. Third, a crisis may cause employees, stakeholders, donors, etc. to distance themselves from the organization. Lastly, a crisis ultimately threatens the existence of an organization (Grider, 2001). These guidelines apply to all organizations, big or small, local or international.

Crisis Criteria

Having guidelines for defining a crisis can make the inventory process run smoother. Lets use an air carrier for an example. Use this as a brainstorming session. Think of anything, which can occur that would lead to any of the above “crisis criteria.” Terrorism, fire, boycott, merger, layoff's, reorganization, and explosions are just a few
types of crisis that can plague an organization. Remember to think critically. Is workplace violence possible here? Yes. Can the president embezzle money? These are all potential crisis. As one can see, there are many which we don’t even think of so that is why we must plan ahead and realize what can happen before it paralyzes a company (Grider, 2000).

In Steven Fink’s book, “Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable”, he discusses his view of crisis forecasting. There are many differentiating ways to carry out this process but Fink developed what he calls, a Crisis Impact Value. His scale, ranging from zero to ten will exemplify in a solid number the fatality or non-fatality that a potential crisis can bring to an organization (Fink, 2000, p. 41). Other authors such as Ian Mitroff, Kathleen Fearn-Banks, and Jeffrey Caponigro, to name a few, also have ways to conduct a crisis inventory and each company needs to assess which they would prefer. The following chart, is an example of Fink’s Crisis Impact Scale which he suggests to use when attempting crisis forecasting (Fink, 2000).

II. 1 – Crisis Impact Scale

Score from 0 (lowest) to 10 (highest) the extent to which a potential crisis would:

1. Escalate in intensity.
2. Fall under close media or government scrutiny.
3. Interfere with the normal operations of business.
4. Jeopardize a positive public image.
5. Damage a company’s bottom line.
**Domino Effect**

Just to point out, in the case of airline carriers, we can say that it is a very independent industry and one organization’s crisis can easily result in a crisis for industry stakeholders. Therefore, the better prepared each industry group is to handle a crisis, the easier it is for the entire industry to survive the crisis (Ray, 1999 p.89). Many individuals at a company do not understand that a crisis at their place of employment can mean a crisis for the entire industry. When Enron closed its doors in 2001, its auditing firm, Arthur Andersen was under much scrutiny. In the December 24 issue of Business Week, new CEO Joseph F. Berardino was stated as telling congress that the firm was “wrong” on one Enron auditing decision (p. 30). This one wrong decision already has Andersen going through its own crisis but it could also have a positive or negative effect on the entire accounting/auditing industry.

Because of Anderson’s “wrong” decision they will most likely lose some business as they already have because of other “wrong” decisions, which would give other companies opportunities to seize new clients. Or the industry may suffer. There is also a slight possibility that other companies who perform the same services as Anderson will be under scrutiny. Maybe they will be audited or potential clients will scrutinize past performance, making sure there were no bad decisions made. In the long run, Andersen should have never let this illegal activity progress to what it did. Who would have ever thought that one company’s bankruptcy would showcase another company in the spotlight?

Although it is quite obvious that no matter what type of business one is employed, a crisis plan or crisis manual is as important as having benefits for employees, and
believe it or not, not all business have one. But this does not mean that a company cannot exercise other methods of crisis planning.

**Prevention / Preparation**

Prevention and preparation are two terms, which go hand in hand. As Ian Mitroff and Gus Anagnos (2001) state, "Even with the best frameworks and the best of preparations, it is unfortunately still the case that not all crisis can be prevented. This even holds true for those crisis that we know with almost complete certainty will occur" (p.6). This leads us to the topic of crisis prevention. There can be many tips and lessons to be learned while practicing crisis prevention. Jeffrey R. Caponigro, CEO of Caponigro Public Relations, in Michigan uses superb examples to show how a crisis could have been prevented and how it escalated. An elderly man at a bank becomes disruptive while waiting in a long line. This is a bank, which serves many elderly customers and has had no previous history of discrimination against the elderly. After the man becomes extremely disturbing the branch manager kindly asks the man to leave. The man refuses and the manager has security escort him out. Two months later the manager receives a call from the banks legal counsel stating the branch was being sued for age discrimination. Could this be possible? There was a lack of ramps to enter the building, small type on brochures and bank forms, and rock and roll music was played. Imagine being the branch manager and having to take all of this in. The elderly man was going to campaign to get the senior citizens to boycott the bank. And the elderly make up a great number of their customers (Caponigro, 2000, pp. 9-10).

There are lessons to be learned here. Sure, who would have ever though that the lack of ramps, music, and brochures would intertwine with a lawsuit? Not many people
but that is all part of crisis prevention. In a crisis inventory, being sued for age
discrimination should have been high on the list if many customers are senior citizens.
Also, if there are not many ramps this should have been taken care of previously. Small
print in brochures should have been fixed because most likely it was small enough to be
difficult for anyone to read (Caponigro, 2000, p.10). These small things could have easily
been taken care of and produced a weak case against the bank or no case at all.

Relationships

Another mechanism for prevention is the many relationships that a business
according to stakeholders' perceptions. "The 'Stakeholder' refers to any group or public
impacted by the organizations operation; employees, consumers, stockholders, suppliers,
competitors, unions, special interest groups, government, media, and the local
community" (pp. 15-16). In preventative crisis measures, it is generally a good idea to
make sure employees of the company know first, who the key stakeholders are.
Additionally, employees should be aware of other groups that the company would want
to foster good relations with incase a crisis was to occur. These relationships can be the
media and even the surrounding community in which the company is located. In the
previous example of the bank, good relations with other customers would have given the
bank an upper hand if there ever was a trial.
Reputation

"Nothing is more important than your reputation, credibility, and trust" (Caponigro, 2000, p.83). If a business has a good reputation, most likely they have good relations with their key publics including those groups that may not be directly involved with the everyday running of the company. When the company Arthur Andersen is mentioned, do we think of good reputation, credibility, and trust? If this company had a great reputation prior to the Enron collapse, would many of their clients be leaving? The reputation, credibility, and trust are gone; for now anyway.

A positive reputation is going to assist an organization even if they never have a crisis. But, as Sally J. Ray (1999) says, "When determining strategic communication options to defend corporate image during a crisis, the organization's performance history as well as its perceived image before the crisis must be considered" (p.70). "More specifically, an organization’s believability is derived from it’s credibility" (Ray, 1999, p70). Most will agree that a corporation with an exceptional reputation prior to a crisis will do better when a crisis occurs than a company with a terrible reputation.

Signals

When Enron fell, there were prodromes that could have assisted the company pre-crisis. Other companies have gone through this and they should have heeded the warning that it could have happened to them. In addition, there is another type of pre-crisis detection that is part of preventing a crisis and those are signals (Mitroff and Anagnos, 2001, p.102). "Prior to actual occurrence, all crisis send out a repeated train of early warning signals. If these signals can be picked up, amplified, and acted upon, then many
crisis can be averted before they happen. True, in many cases, the signals are weak and filled with noise. Nonetheless, it usually turns out that there is at least one person in every organization who knows about an impending crisis” (Mitroff and Anagnos, 2001, p.102).

To assist in understanding the importance of signals, the author will take an excerpt from the book, *Managing Crisis Before They Happen*, regarding the Space Shuttle Challenger.

The Presidential Commission Report into the causes of the accident found in no uncertain terms that the technical cause was the faulty O-ring design. However, even more serious was a faulty organization that prevented those who had serious doubts about the adequacy of the design from being heard. In effect, their voices and concerns were prevented from getting to the top of the organization.

The Appendix to the Presidential Commission Report contains an “audit” of a string of memos that failed to make it from the bowels of the organization to the top. One of the most revealing memos begins with the painful cry “Help!” In no uncertain terms, the memo says that if the space shuttle continues to fly with the current design, then a disaster is virtually guaranteed to happen (Mitroff and Anagnos, 2001, pp.102-103).

“One of the most important findings in CM is that with very few exceptions, crisis send out a trail of early warning signals before their actual occurrence” (Ibid, as cited by Mitroff, Pearson, and Harrington, 1996, p.47). “If such signals can be detected, many crisis can be prevented from occurring-the best possible form of CM” (Mitroff et al.,
1996, p.47). If this example of the Challenger does not exemplify to the greatest magnitude the importance of signals, than nothing will.

**Corporate Culture**

Detecting signals can be a difficult task. If there is a positive corporate culture within an organization internal communications should be an effective way of deterring or taking control of a crisis. The Challenger is a superb example of this. If all channels of communication were open, this disaster may have never occurred. There are many organizations that do not have a positive corporate culture. Organizational Ideology is what Kathleen Fearn-Banks refers to as corporate culture. “An organization’s philosophy, its working climate, its corporate culture. Each person’s experience with organizations-no matter how small or large.puts him in contact with that organization’s ideology, its corporate culture. There are norms of dress, formal rules, informal codes of conduct, taboos, jokes, language, and more” (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p. 13)

“These are elements of organizational culture. They make up an invisible, internalized whip that cracks and tells us what we can do, what we cannot do, what we can say, and what we cannot say in our dealings with the organization” (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.13). If employees feel they cannot communicate within an organization this will cause a large problem sooner or later. Corporate Culture is not to be taken lightly. Most companies do not at all see the relevance into why it is so important to recognize what type of culture the organization has. To prove this point, the NTSB conducted a symposium, “Corporate Culture and Transportation Safety.” “During this two-day forum, representatives from government, industry, and academia gathered to explore ways
organizational management philosophy and practices directly affect the day-to-day operations of the nation’s transportation system.” “A commitment to safety at this highest level ultimately influences every pilot, flight attendant, maintenance technician, air traffic controller, dispatcher, and the many others who help to run an airline” (Ray, 1999, p.38).

In other words, most of the company will follow the examples set by the people in charge.

“In a crisis, the public perceives truth to be whatever public opinion says” (Fern-Banks, 1996 p.9). The author will use this phrase once again when it comes to containing a crisis. But in this case it is vitally important because it ties together every point from, being a reputable company to having good relations inside and outside of the business with people from surrounding communities to the media that controls much of the information regarding the company.

**Crisis Management Team (CMT)**

“Before you assemble a crisis management plan, you must first assemble the crisis management team (CMT) or teams” (Steven Fink, 2000, p.57).

Fink attests that every crisis demands a crisis management team to run the plays, which may be called by the CEO or by some technical authority. But the team must huddle on a regular basis to review game plans. Different types of crisis may require different types of team members. There should be a central core to each team. Depending on the type of business, a central core of permanent CMT members might include either the CEO or someone from senior management; the CFO, or even the head of public relations. This is done so that, when the crisis hits, no one has to sit around and
wonder who ought to be called in. The decision has already been made. And it has been made at the best possible time: when everything is running smoothly and there is no crisis. (Fink, 2000, p. 57)

In the crisis management world, the author would say that all experts agree that the crisis management team is a part of crisis management that is pertinent. “One thing is clear: Given the diverse makeup that a CMT requires, advance training is necessary so team members can learn to balance and integrate their various perspectives. For instance, lawyers typically want to say as little as possible during a crisis in order to avoid or minimize legal liability. Marketing, public affairs, and public relations executives, on the other hand, want to share information more broadly as a means of retaining or recovering consumer confidence and hence safeguarding their business” (Mitroff, et. al., 1996, p.13). These authors also highlight an important point and that is during a crisis is the worst possible time to iron out inevitable disagreements among different roles and perspectives (p.13).

Every single aspect that pertains to a CMT cannot be discussed in this publication. One question that most companies are unsure of is how many people should be on the CMT? In Jeffrey Caponigro’s book, The Crisis Counselor, he makes the point of discussing the optimum number of people that should be on a CMT. “The group should be large enough to obtain a sufficient amount of input and involvement for the size and complexity of your business. However, the team size shouldn’t be so large that it stifles the input and exchange of ideas and concerns. Therefore, the number of people on your CMT is likely to be between five and ten-and possibly even fewer at a smaller company (p.103).
Crisis Box

The author would like to mention one last piece of crisis prevention/preparation, often overlooked but just as important as other precautions. This would be something called a "crisis box" (Grider, 2001). In the book, crisis communications by Kathleen Fearn Banks, she refers to this as a communications plan. This box is something, which all key players on the CMT should have in a place where they can always get to it. For example, if you were in one of the Twin Towers in New York City, you would not have been able to get to your desk in that crisis situation. It will contain documents one is going to need during a crisis to clothes incase one has to stay at a certain location over night and can’t go home. The author will break this down into two parts. The first part being those documents and parts that are directly linked to the business; evacuation procedures, building blueprints, company policies, procedures, lists with names and addresses and more than one phone number for all executives and employees of each department, letterhead, company annual report, media contacts, key public contacts, etc. (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.24).

Other things which should be included in this box are: pencils, pens, snack bars, batteries, cell phone, emergency contact numbers for renting emergency equipment, tools, and vehicles. Also, things like flashlights, stapler, staples, extra clothes with company logo, hat, toothbrush, toothpaste, brush, small shampoos, etc. The documents listed above should be put into a binder and divided into sections so things are very easy to find and take out and make copies of. Then all of these items can be put into a rolling suitcase, duffel bag, or anything that is easy to carry and provides a lot of room. The more things you have, the better prepared you will be. If your office goes up in flames,
where are you going to get all these important documents? Chances are, you do not know
the biography for example of the CFO. So when a media person asks you, you better have
the information handy or you and the company are going to look unprepared (Grider,
2001).

There are companies that specialize in crisis management and as a company
implements a CMT, it may be wise to consult the specialists if a company is having a
difficult time compiling the CMT and understanding all of its responsibilities. During the
containment of a crisis is when the team really comes into play and the author will
discuss that in depth in the following sections.

Steven Fink really does put it best when he stresses the importance of the crisis
management team. He writes, “You simply want to know where the flashlights are before
you need them”(Fink, 2000, p.58).

In the book, Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable, Fink (2000, p. 88)
presents a great example of what types of information should be included in your “crisis
box.” For example, if you are a chemical plant and a potential crisis may be pollution or
toxic waste, you should be prepared to report immediately on your plant’s health and
ecological record with the government. EPA documents, citing previous leaks, what the
company spends per year improving waste-removal systems, and other documents such
as these to show first handed, that the company is doing a its part in conserving the
environment. If a company can not come up with these documents even after a few hours
of a crisis, this should have itself been a prodrome to the lurking troubles ahead.
The author should mention that this is just a recommended list and other components should be added in an orderly fashion depending on the type of organization and other pieces one may feel they need.

So, why is it necessary to plan for a crisis? Jeffrey Caponigro (2000, p.97-98) reviews what the author has discussed in the previous section. A few reasons why businesses need to plan for crisis situations:

- Crisis situations occur in every organization.
- Many crisis can be prevented or greatly minimized—well before they cause severe damage.
- A properly prepared business is more likely to be better focused and more decisive and effective when a crisis occurs.
- Many decisions need to be made, actions need to be taken, and materials need to be produced when a crisis occurs; a surprisingly high number of these can be made in advance.
- It’s easier to make smart decisions when you don’t feel the pressure of a guillotine hovering over your head.
- The input of others can be obtained more effectively when sought in advance.

In other words, to be prepared is obviously the better option than not being prepared in a crisis situation. We plan our retirements, plan where we are going on the weekend, plan where we will go on vacation, plan where we will go to college and how we will pay for it, so why should business be any different? We all know that planning in advance outweigh the benefits of not planning at all.

**Containment**

Containing a crisis. Is there such a thing? Yes. Just think of it as a wildfire. You want to keep it from spreading or you will have to spend more money, get more people involved and ultimately, more will be destroyed than you ever thought possible. When the company is focusing on containment this means the crisis is happening. Steven Fink
refers to this stage also as the acute crisis stage. He states that some damage has been done at this point; how much additional damage occurs depends on you (p.20).

"Containment refers to the effort to limit the duration of the crisis or keep it from spreading to other areas affecting the organization" (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.7). There are some crisis that the public never hears about and those examples are really what a company hopes for. But in most cases, that will not happen. So as players in business we have to do our part as to contain a crisis as much as possible.

"As with other stages of a crisis, this stage usually occurs at avalanchelike speed and intensity. The speed is dependent primarily on the type of crisis, while the intensity is usually determined by the severity or value of the possible outcome(s). Remember, no matter how long you may feel you are in the acute crisis stage for, this is often the shortest phase of a crisis" (Fink, 2000, p. 23).

Responsibility

Steven Fink (2000) highlights that this is your crisis, like it or not, and since it is your crisis, you at least have the ability to shape the public’s initial (and perhaps total) perception of what has happened or is happening (p.93). “As a general rule, CM-prepared organizations assume responsibility even when they are not responsible” (Ibid, as cited by Mitroff, et al. 1996, p. 33). “This does not mean that they are pushovers that accept responsibility for everything; rather it means that concern for their consumers, employees, the general public, and the environment is valued over immediate, short term profits” (Mitroff, et al. 1996, p. 33).
Admit to the Mistake

Fearn-Banks (1996) attests, “If your organization has erred, it is usually better to reveal the mistake at once, and make amends. Cover-ups make a crisis persist” (p.65). Jeffrey Caponigro (2000) agrees, as do most crisis professionals, that “In most cases, people will be more willing to forgive and support your business if you admit to a mistake. Frustrations arise when they suspect that the company doesn’t recognize the mistake or its impact on others. In that situation, customers, and others emerge as angry and vindictive-unless you prove to them that specific steps are being taken to solve the problem” (p.149).

Caponigro (2000, p.149-150) lists proactive steps to take during a crisis that every company should heed to:

- Admit the mistake – usually it is quite apparent in a crisis who is at fault. If the mistake is the companies’, admit it and move on to correct what has happened.
- Apologize, if appropriate – if you or the business made a mistake that negatively affected others, apologize for the error, and shoulder the responsibility for it.
- Show your displeasure and disappointment over the situation – Even though you may not have been the one that caused the problem, show that you are more displeased and disappointed about the situation than anyone else.
- Describe steps taken to solve the problem quickly and effectively – The publics will beat on the company or individual until they are convinced that you’re solving the problem. The publics want to hear what you are doing so they can decide if the problem has been sufficiently addressed.
- Explain steps taken to ensure that it doesn’t happen again – Your publics will expect to hear what steps the business is taking to ensure the crisis does not happen again. These can include changes in policies, procedures, personnel, etc.
- Mention how you will keep them informed on the progress – Your publics want to know that this is not the last time they will hear about the situation (depending on it’s severity). They want to know when they will learn more.
- Reinforce your appreciation of them – It’s important to thank employees, customers, vendors, and your other publics for their support and cooperation during the difficult situation. Mention the importance of their support and that you appreciate their understanding while the situation is being resolved.
Media

The above list represents rules to live by during a crisis. Now that the crisis has opened up, how is the company or business, etc., going to get their messages out? This leads us into what may be one of the most important components of containing a crisis or at least dealing with one. During a crisis, the media will most likely be irritating, aggravating, and annoying, but will be very useful when dealing with a crisis. The media is most likely the outlet in which one is going to use during a crisis. The media is very demanding and as much as they want to cooperate with you, you need to cooperate with them.

When a crisis occurs, one must anticipate what the media needs and wants (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p. 64). What do the customers want to know? What do the investors want to know? And is some cases, what do the families of the victims want to know? Fearn-Banks (1996) and Mitroff et al. (1996) highlight questions which the media would want to know:

- What happened?
- Were there any deaths or injuries?
- What is the extent of the damage?
- Is there a danger of future injuries or damage?
- Why did it happen?
- Who or what is responsible?
- What is being done about it?
- When will it be over?
- Has it happened before?
- Were there any warning signs of the problem?

One may notice that these questions overlap with some of the bullets presented by Caponigro. Rightfully so, because those are points which need to be addresses by a company while the media is most likely going to touch on those points anyway.
Spokesperson

"The goal is to keep or get the public trust though the media" (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p. 65). The spokesperson during a crisis should have already been chosen long before a crisis had even occurred. According to Sally J. Ray, (1999) and many other crisis experts, "The spokesperson is the one who sets the tone and style for handling the crisis and is the key contact for all media. Usually the spokesperson is a member of the crisis team, is cool-headed, articulate, knowledgeable, and creditable" (p. 52). "The CEO is considered by most public relations professionals to be the spokesperson of choice during a crisis" (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p. 66). Sometimes, the CEO may not be the most effective communicator and the crisis team must select someone who can effectively communicate to represent the organization (Ray, 1999, p. 52).

To effectively communicate, the spokesperson must know everything regarding the crisis. The spokesperson should never say, "no comment." When the public hears "no comment," it appears that there is something to hide and the public is not able to hear the other side of the story. And don't forget that the media will do their story with or without comment from the company. The media does not need comments from the main source, they can go to disgruntled employees, investors, parents, children, communities around the company, old files, and old mistakes (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.64).

Open Communication

Always, no matter what, tell the media, which in turn will let the publics know, what is going on and tell them everything you know. "Honest and open communication with the authorities and the media does not require perfect, instantaneous knowledge."
Furthermore, although every attempt should be made to ensure that communication is accurate, the spokesperson should avoid speculation. Initial statements and actions can be revised as more is learned. There is nothing wrong with saying at the outset, we don’t know exactly what happened, but I promise we will get back to you as soon as we do know more" (Mitroff, et al. 1996, p.18-19). Mitroff et al. (1996), makes the point that, “there are no secrets in CM. Your organization’s responses to questions and issues will not only be discovered but will also be publicized. As a result, your ability to respond will become the grounds on which your organization will be judged. Remember, the company’s strengths and weaknesses will be investigated repeatedly and magnified for all to see, especially on the front pages of national newspapers and the opening minutes of newscasts” (p.21).

It is appropriate to set media briefings throughout the crisis. Therefore, the media can obtain the information they are looking for, from you and not from the “man on the street.” Do not hold briefings every hour but as much as they need to be held. It’s really about making the company available to communicate what is going on. “Executives at Johnson & Johnson, from almost day one of the Tylenol crisis, made themselves available to one-on-one interviews with the media and appeared on most of the morning talk shows and evening news programs” (Fink, 2000, p. 111). Obviously, this is not always the case and is not necessary all the time. The CMT will be able to decide if going to this extent is necessary.

Publics

Additionally, while trying to manage the crisis, the organization must know who they are communicating with. Here is a list of key publics, for example, which an
organization may need to be communicating with; board members, shareholders, financial partners, investors, community leaders, customers, clients, suppliers, vendors, neighbors of the organization, competitors, key management, employees, legal representation, media, union officials, retirees, government officials and families of victims (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p. 26.) An organization must decide how and what they are going to tell their publics early on in the crisis. The publics will continually need to be in contact with the organization for various reasons, depending on the crisis.

It seems to be most obvious to always respond to the emotional needs of your publics. When an airline tragedy occurs and there are fatalities, tend to the families of the victims first. Northwest Airlines, for example, set up a phone line for families of victims, managers were assigned to assist victims families, Northwest offered to pay for travel expenses, funeral costs, and offered refunds to customers who wanted to cancel later flights (Ray, 1999, p. 65). Communicating with victims’ families can be a grueling task. The author believes it is an important public to touch upon because many companies have problems communicating with grieving families. “An effective crisis response involves providing information and support and showing compassion, sensitivity, and respect to these individuals. Despite its best efforts, in the context of devastation and grief the company may still be perceived as uncaring and insensitive”(Ray, 1999, p. 49). No matter what business you are in, when a crisis occurs, it is most likely that it is disrupting the lives of some people. For example, if you are an electric company and the power goes out, customers are inconvenienced. “If people are inconvenienced and your company is the key to life as usual, it does not matter that you did not cause the disaster”(Fearn-Banks, 1996, p. 168).
Although, an organization is trying to assist their publics during this stage of the crisis, it may not be that easy to contain. Just to set an example, a crisis can extend to more areas than ever expected. For example, the Travel Business Roundtable findings released on October 9, 2001, found that 20 percent of people say they’ll discourage friends and relatives from flying during the holidays and nearly 80 percent think that another terrorist attack is likely. Because people were afraid to fly, car rentals were down and so were hotel stays. CEO of Loews Hotels, Jonathan Tisch, said he will likely loose $2 billion this year (Businessweek, Special Report, October 22, 2001, p. 14). The terrorist attacks on the United States did not just destroy lives and buildings; it destroyed restaurants, apartments, car rental businesses, etc. Did anyone ever think that if this type of crisis ever happened, the repercussions would have been this severe?

Ray makes an important point in the wake of a crisis. “While a crisis generally presents a threat, opportunities may be introduced. A crisis focuses attention on one concern, calls for cooperation, and gives the company a chance to demonstrate its capabilities and concern for people affected and for the interests of the community involved”(Stephenson, 1982, as cited by Ray, 1999, p.18).

As the author mentioned previously, this stage of the crisis may seem to last the longest but usually does not. The hope is that an organization has prepared previously for a crisis and if one does occur, because crisis are inevitable, an organization has the capability to move positively forward in business and take care of the crisis the best way possible.
Recovery

"Most crisis do not go away easily. They can leave a dirty, untidy mess from which it isn’t easy to recover. Employee morale might be low. Sales could be soft. Trust and credibility in your business might be shaken" (Caponigro, 2000, p. 230). Recovery is almost the last stage of crisis management for an organization. This is when efforts to return the company to business as usual are in full swing (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.8).

How does an organization know when the recovery should begin? Caponigro (2000, p.230) suggests using some of the following questions:

- Are a lot of questions still being asked about the problem?
- Is employee morale continuing to be affected?
- Are the news media still interested in the situation?
- Are rumors still circulating about the crisis?
- Have the company sales and share price rebounded to pre-crisis levels?
- Are you finding that the crisis no longer grabs as much attention and focus from your managers as it once did?
- Do your instincts and judgement indicate that the crisis is no longer a major issue in your organization?

"Organizations will want to leave the crisis behind and restore normalcy as soon as possible. It may mean restoring the confidence of key publics, which means communicating this return to normal business"(Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.8). An organization will have already hopefully begun doing this during the containment stage of the crisis but in this stage more than ever, it’s time to try and return the organization to normal.

Normalcy can consist of opening the business, for example. If there was a murder at the local supermarket, most likely, the store would be closed for a few weeks. This is the period in which the organization decides when it is ok to open up again, if at all in some cases.
Using Arthur Andersen as an example, we can see that their initial crisis is over. But, the initial crisis is snowballing and Andersen, most likely, never thought that would happen. Have they issued a statement to the public stating what they are doing to fix these problems at the organization? No. In regard to the initial Enron-Andersen crisis has Andersen really admitted to doing anything wrong? No. Andersen is the prefect example of an organization that did not follow any part of the previous mentioned stages and tactics on how to handle a crisis and unfortunately for them, it does not seem as if there will be a stage of recovery.

The author wants to point out that not every organization is going to have a “full-recovery.” Some organizations may not have a recovery at all but the positive aspect of this is that is assists in future planning of crisis management.

**Learning**

Undoubtedly, there must be a stage in the crisis management process called learning. Learning is different from recovery in that, “The learning phase is a process of examining the crisis and determining what was lost, what was gained, and how the organization performed in the crisis” (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.8).

Fink (2000, p.91) suggests that an a person either starts on their own or assigns a crisis evaluation team to the task to review, assess, evaluate, rate, and dissect exactly what happened, how it could have been prevented, and, if it happened again, what, if anything would the organization do differently.

This is when the crisis management team is evaluated; did the team perform well? Were there individuals who cracked under pressure, etc.? It may seem that learning focuses on many of the negative aspects of a crisis but that should not be the only task.
This is also the time when members of the organization who excelled should be praised. And if the crisis plan and all the preparation which should have been done previous to the crisis, worked, many should be commended for their hard work and again for preparing a plan and making it flow like clockwork (Fink, 2000, p.91).

If there are aspects of a CMP that were not perfect, this is the time to correct them. It will be more than possible that the CMP, which an organization has is not going to touch on every aspect of a crisis, unless that company has been through that crisis already. After a crisis, an organization knows exactly what to expect if this type of crisis ever happens again.

Not only does the crisis-stricken organization learn from this, but also other organizations can now take the time to learn from the crisis of this company. It may be a competitor, part of the larger company, the business next door or in the same neighborhood, etc.

How each organization goes about this part crisis management is up to them. Depending on the crisis, there are different ways to assist in the learning process. An employee can call customers, employees, the general public, investors, and in due time, maybe families of victims, etc., too see how they thought the company handled the crisis.

“One might think that this is like closing the barn door after the cows have escaped. Any farmer will tell you that once the cows are back in the barn, they will escape again. Just because a company has suffered one crisis, is no indication that it will not happen again” (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.8).
Chapter III

Research Methods

Purpose

The purpose of the research conducted was to discover what information employees know, believe, and recall regarding crisis management. For example, the topics range from, crises a person can recall to, do most employees believe their place of employment has any type of crisis management plan, and also how communication during a crisis should be handled. All questions were pertaining to the views and beliefs the participant has developed regarding crisis management.

The information gathered from the survey assisted the author in developing a type of outline or steps, that can guide an organization in developing their own crisis management plan or even direct an organization through an occurring crisis. It is interesting as well as pertinent to learn how employees of an organization view their own organizations as well as others regarding crisis management. This can lead to organizations improving plans and even implementing a new one. In addition, the survey was meant to make people aware of crisis and to recall that a crisis can happen anywhere at any time.

Survey Design

There were three parts of this survey. The first section of the survey was a Likert scale. “A Likert scale asks respondents to indicate the extent to which they either agree or disagree with a series of mental belief or behavioral belief statements about a given object” (Hair, Bush, and Ortinau, 2000, p. 415). This consisted of 10 statements and five answers in which the survey subject could choose from. The answers were strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. That section of the survey was
based on individual experiences and observations. The author believes using the ratings scale rather than a yes and no for example, gave the subject a more concise way to convey their thoughts as well as a better understanding of what employees really believed.

Furthermore, after the subject completed the section, there was a place for comments and suggestions. This gives the subject a place to add or discuss an answer he or she gave or feelings they may have had toward a certain subject and even suggestions for the author.

The following section of the survey was an open input section. In this section, individual experiences were used to answer four questions regarding the management of crisis that the participant could recall. This section was effective in many ways. It presented past occurrences which may or may not have been actual crisis. This exemplified if the participants really knew what a crisis was. Also, the author wanted to see if there might have been a reoccurring crisis that people would recall.

Lastly, the author included a general information page, which was optional for the participant to fill out. This page covered whether the participant was male or female, what industry they were currently employed in, the position they held at that organization, and how long they have been employed at their current job. This may give the author some insight of which industries have been involved in a crisis or have been trained in crisis situations or even some that do not have any confidence that their organization could handle a crisis well.

The following four pages is a display of the author’s survey.
*Please Read Below*

This survey is being done to assist with the completion of the thesis titled, "What are the components of developing an efficacious crisis management plan in response to recent current events?"

All results will be confidential and will be destroyed after use. If you would like the results of the survey, please fill in your information below.

Objective: The objective of this survey is to gain feedback on the public's perspectives regarding crisis management, and suggestions for improvement. This will assist in the development of an effective crisis management plan.

Thank you.

Joette McGill
Seton Hall University
Communications Research

Your Name: ______________________
Address: ______________________

Fig. 1
Rate the following statements on the basis of your experiences and observations of crisis situations, which you have directly or indirectly encountered.

SA-Strongly Agree  A-Agree  N-Neutral  D-Disagree  SD-Strongly Disagree

1. Our organization most likely has a crisis management plan.                      SA A N D SD

2. A CEO or other high-ranking official should be the prime spokesperson after a tragedy. SA A N D SD

3. Most organizations are prepared if a crisis was to occur.                      SA A N D SD

4. My organization is most likely prepared if a crisis was to occur.              SA A N D SD

5. Most of the time, a crisis can be prevented.                                   SA A N D SD

6. Companies/businesses usually handle crisis effectively.                       SA A N D SD

7. Communication efforts, during a crisis are usually timely and clear.          SA A N D SD

8. Most people in my company can identify our key stakeholders.                 SA A N D SD

9. Prior to recent events, I was comfortable flying on an airline.               SA A N D SD

10. Following recent events, I am uncomfortable flying on an airline.             SA A N D SD

Additional comments or suggestions: ________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Fig. 2
Questionnaire: Based on individual experiences.

1. List one company you can recall that handled a crisis effectively.
   
   A.

2. How was the crisis handled effectively?
   
   A.

3. List one company you can recall that handled a crisis ineffectively.
   
   A.

4. How was the crisis handled ineffectively?
   
   A.
General Information
Please answer all, some, or none of the below.

1. Male ____  Female ____

2. In what industry are you currently employed?

__________________________

3. What is your position at the company?

__________________________

4. How many years have you been employed at your current job?

0-3 ____  4-6 ____  6-8 ____  9-12 ____  other ____

Fig. 4
Distribution

In a time frame of three months, the author distributed 62 surveys. Fifty individuals were able to respond to the questionnaire. The individuals responded in a variety of ways: via email, over the phone, and at their leisure. Approximately, 81 percent of the respondents were given the survey and able to complete it at their convenience. In addition, a small percentage of the respondents also gave the survey to coworkers.

The participants were all employed, some at the same organization. To get a general overview of the varying beliefs of crisis management, the author distributed the survey to a number of different organizations. These were including but not limited to higher education, financial services, insurance services, food services and pharmaceuticals.

After collecting the surveys, the author tallied the results by dividing the number of responses in each category (strongly agree to strongly disagree) by the total number of surveys which were completed. This process gave the percentage of respondents who answered each question.

General Conclusions Regarding Survey Participants

Many of the participants were eager to participate in the survey. The author believes this to be a result of the September 2001 attacks on the United States. There were various participants who spoke about the relevance of crisis management since organizations are experiencing layoffs, mergers, and individual crisis. Additionally, the 2001 attacks on the United States were mentioned multiple times in different parts of the survey.
Among the participants, there were some that wrote about the survey and/or crisis communications. Opinions varied regarding how the survey was set up to additional information which some felt needed to be included. The author believes that in some cases, the knowledge regarding crisis management was limited so participants felt they needed additional information where it was not needed for the purpose of this survey. For instance, there was one person who felt they needed to know what type of crisis it was to answer the question of, "Communication efforts during a crisis are usually timely and clear." This person is employed in the field of higher education and may not have ample knowledge of what crisis management is. Someone who works in a more corporate setting may have more working knowledge of crisis management, for example.

While some people were acquainted with crisis management, the author still found that many did not know what a real crisis was. Yes, when the annual report is not done and someone has to tell the boss, this may seem like a crisis, but in actuality it is not.

Preparation is a very important aspect of being ready for anything and employees of all fields felt that preparation was a crucial part of managing any type of crisis. Control of the situation was another aspect which participants were concerned with. Both, preparation and control are important parts of crisis management but there are many other parts, which need to be addressed and practiced by these employees.

**Revelations**

**Open-ended Questions**

The area of crisis management is one, which most employees of organizations need to be educated about. In the open-ended questions, there were telltale signs, which exemplified that employees were not very sure what a real crisis was. For example, many
participants said that companies handled a crisis ineffectively by laying off employees. In most cases of crisis, the crisis was not the laying off of employees but the cause of the layoff. Dismissing many from jobs, is of course a crisis, in the sense of the word but when defining a crisis, letting go of employees is not the real crisis.

There were also 24% of respondents who did not answer the open-ended questions fully. This was surprising because there are so many current crisis. Answers ranged from, "I do not know of any companies who handled crisis ineffectively/effectively," to "I have never been involved in that situation." The author thought that was going to be an effortless part of the survey for participants because of all the crisis that just went on in the years 2001-2002. With the small sample size and the location of many survey participants it was unexpected that some answers were left blank.

Lastly, the author believed that most people would have used the current crisis situations to describe the effective/ineffective organizations. Instead, 36% mentioned either the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis or the Ford/Firestone crisis. Twenty-six percent mentioned either Enron or Arthur Andersen and only 14% mentioned any organization that was directly affected by the September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centers in New York City. The author assumed many more participants would have mentioned organizations which, were directly affected because many people in this area of the country were directly or indirectly involved with the situation.

**Likert Survey Statements**

Interestingly, 48% of the respondents said that their organization most likely had a crisis management plan but 50% felt that most organizations were not prepared if a
crisis was to occur. The correlation here is interesting because people think that their
own company has a plan but may not be prepared to use it. Or, it could be that
employee’s think their organization is ready to conquer a crisis while they believe other
companies are not. While these assumptions may or may not be true only 42% conclude
that their organization is actually prepared if a crisis was to occur. These are disturbing
and surprising numbers. Most employees do not know whether the organization has a
crisis management plan, as exemplified in the 48% agree rate. That number should have
been closer to 100%.

Crisis can usually be prevented right? According to research and past crisis, that is
ture. But according to the survey, 32% said that crises cannot be prevented. This number
should not have been this large. Almost all crises could have been prevented.

Additionally, 48% were neutral regarding how organizations handle crisis. Forty-
eight percent said that they really didn’t know if businesses handle crisis effectively. The
author thought that most would agree that most organizations handle crisis effectively.
Only 22% agreed and 30% disagreed. If people are unsure how organizations handle
crisis, than the organizations may be doing something wrong. The public should be able
to recall how a crisis ended, especially if it ended positively for the organization.

Lastly, the author believed that many more respondents would have agreed that
they were uncomfortable flying after recent events. This question was looking to relate
that fact that one crisis can lead to crisis for other organizations. Surprisingly, 42%
disagreed that they were uncomfortable about flying after recent events. There were only
24% who agreed that they were uncomfortable about flying after recent events. Many
times one organizations crisis can mean bad news for other companies as well. If the
survey was given right after the September 2001 attacks, maybe the percentages would have shown differently.

In these examples, it seems that organizations need to educate their employees in crisis management. This does not mean every employee will be involved in the crisis plan but they should at least know if their company has one in place. And one of the most unpleasant findings was that a large number of people believe that crisis cannot be prevented. This thought process is not positive for employees, which work in an ever-changing environment where crisis can be prevented. The urgency of training employees so they know, that they are the ones who can prevent crisis and bring attention to potential crisis, is of utter importance this day in age.

Validations

Open-ended Questions

Fortunately, there were many more validations in this survey than there were revelations. In the field of crisis management, this is good news. First, as much as organizations want their employees, publics, shareholders, etc., to forget about past crisis, this does not happen. This is proven in that 50% of respondents mentioned either the Ford/Firestone crisis, the Enron crisis, or the Johnson & Johnson crisis as organizations which handled crisis effectively or ineffectively. This result illustrates that no matter what type of crisis you have, it does not have to involve lose of life for people to remember. So, organizations must do their best to have a positive result at the end or at least have people remember the crisis and have positive things to say about the respective organization. Many who did recall Johnson & Johnson did say that the company handled
their crises effectively. Ford and Enron on the other hand were opposite but this is to be expected as they did not control their crisis effectively.

In addition, there were a few respondents who mentioned organizations that were affected by the September 2001 attacks. This was expected and most felt that these organizations handled the crisis positively. There were two who also mentioned the fire departments and how they responded during the September events. That is an organization, which many never think of as a company but in actuality they are. And fire companies are a great example of organizations that have potential crisis every day and have a plan to tackle most of them.

The author knew there would be people who were part of their own crisis. There were four respondents who mentioned they had an anthrax scare at their place of employment. The validation in this case was that, the company had a crisis and they should have had a plan for not just an anthrax scare but for a contamination scare. The respondents said their organization did not handle the crisis effectively. The only reason they knew something wasn’t right was because there were police surrounding their building. There were others who used their own experiences as well and to have experienced a crisis first hand is a great learning tool for employees. Experiencing a crisis teaches one what to do next time, what to do better, what did not work, and how to plan more effectively. Unfortunately, some organizations need to have a crisis before realizing a crisis can really happen to any company.
Likert Survey Statements

There were many validations in this part of the survey. One that the author was sure about was that a CEO or high-ranking official should be the prime spokesperson after a tragedy. Of course, 64% strongly agreed and 28% agreed this was correct.

Are communication efforts during a crisis usually timely and clear? Expectedly, 46% disagreed that communication was not timely and clear. This may be because at the beginning of a crisis, the organization may not know a lot of information, so people think the organization did not handle it effectively. In contrast, it was interesting that 46% said communication efforts were poor but 48% said they didn’t know if companies handle crisis effectively, so how do 46% talk about communication efforts if it looks as if most companies don’t have them? The 48% should have been disagree and not neutral with the correlation playing a role in the answers.

Identifying key stakeholders in an organization is very important, especially when it comes to crisis. There are 50% who feel that their coworkers can identify their key stakeholders but there were almost 50% who disagreed and felt neutral that their coworkers could not identify stakeholders. This is the case in most organizations. About half of employees can identify the publics of the organization but half cannot. The author assumed this to be the case and it proves why many organizations do not communicate to the appropriate publics during a crisis.

Are most organizations prepared if a crisis was to occur? Fifty percent don’t think so. This was not shocking because the author believes people think most organizations are not prepared because they always recall the organizations who were not prepared or organizations who seemed to have flawed communication efforts. In general, most
organizations may have some type of plan intact but are not experienced enough with it to really know how to use it.

**Concluding Remarks**

As with any survey there are going to be revelations and validations. With the information gathered, we can see what pieces of crisis management need to be worked on at most organizations. Many organizations need to inform all employees if they have a crisis management plan and if those employees are involved and how to handle a crisis. If some of these organizations could see that most of their employees that the author surveyed, thought that their organization was not ready if a crisis was to occur, they would most likely be surprised. If the employees have no confidence in the organization, why should anyone else?

Much of the information proved the hypothesis and information that is available and observable regarding crisis management. For example, spokespersons, key stakeholders, and effective crisis management. There was also information, which was in some ways unexpected, including respondents recalling past crisis more than current ones and that most crisis cannot be prevented.

Questionnaires are a great way to get general feedback and opinions from a certain public regarding specific issues. This can assist organizations and even crisis organizations to master what needs to be improved, implemented, redone, reviewed, and expelled from crisis management plans. No organization wants to be that one which people recall as not handling a crisis effectively and this survey would be a starting point for any organization to gain feedback from employees.
Chapter IV

In a society which seems to be prone to crisis, it is valuable to gain feedback from employees from different organizations regarding opinions, thoughts, and general knowledge about crisis management. This survey assisted in proving and developing steps to avoid, handle, and deal with a crisis. The results of the survey are as follows:

Research Results

**Quantitative Results** - Analysis of survey, breakdown by percentage
Total = 50 Surveys Received

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question #</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13 = 26%</td>
<td>24 = 48%</td>
<td>5 = 1%</td>
<td>8 = 16%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>32 = 64%</td>
<td>14 = 28%</td>
<td>1 = 2%</td>
<td>2 = 4%</td>
<td>1 = 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>4 = 8%</td>
<td>14 = 28%</td>
<td>25 = 50%</td>
<td>7 = 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6 = 12%</td>
<td>21 = 42%</td>
<td>13 = 26%</td>
<td>8 = 16%</td>
<td>2 = 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5*</td>
<td>3 = 6%</td>
<td>16 = 32%</td>
<td>10 = 20%</td>
<td>16 = 32%</td>
<td>4 = 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>11 = 22%</td>
<td>24 = 48%</td>
<td>15 = 30%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7*</td>
<td>1 = 2%</td>
<td>13 = 26%</td>
<td>11 = 22%</td>
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<td>1 = 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3 = 6%</td>
<td>25 = 50%</td>
<td>8 = 16%</td>
<td>13 = 26%</td>
<td>1 = 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10 = 20%</td>
<td>29 = 58%</td>
<td>3 = 6%</td>
<td>7 = 14%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>7 = 14%</td>
<td>12 = 24%</td>
<td>9 = 18%</td>
<td>21 = 42%</td>
<td>1 = 2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Questions five and seven total only 98% because there is one answer missing from both.
Quantitative Results with Questions

Statement 1: Our organization most likely has a crisis management plan.

For this statement, 13 respondents or 26% strongly agreed, that their organization most likely has a crisis management plan. Twenty-four respondents or 48% agreed, 5 or 1% felt neutral, 8 or 16% disagreed, and no one felt their organization did not have a crisis management plan.

Statement 2: A CEO or other high ranking official should be the prime spokesperson after a tragedy.

In evaluating this statement, 32 respondents (64%) replied they strongly agreed that a CEO or a high ranking official should be the prime spokesperson after a crisis. Fourteen people agreed (28%), 1 person was neutral (2%), 2 responded disagree (4%), and 1 person (2%) said they don’t agree that a CEO or high ranking official should be the spokesperson after a tragedy.

Statement 3: Most organizations are prepared if a crisis was to occur.

The breakdown of responses went as follows: There were not any respondents who strongly agreed that organizations were prepared to handle a crisis. There were only 4 (8%) of respondents who agreed, 14 (28%) who felt neutral, but 25 (50%) disagreed that most organizations were prepared if a crisis was to occur. Finally, there were 7 or 14% who strongly felt that most organizations were not prepared for a crisis.

Statement 4: My organization is most likely prepared if a crisis was to occur.

After assessing this statement, the author found that 6 respondents or 12% strongly agreed that their organization was prepared if a crisis was to occur. There were 21 respondents or 42%, who agreed their organization was prepared, 13 or 26% felt
neutral, 8 (16%) disagreed, and only 2 people (4%) felt as if their organization was not prepared at all if a crisis was to occur.

Statement 5: Most of the time, a crisis can be prevented.

The results for statement five were as follows. Three respondents (6%) strongly agreed with this statement. Sixteen respondents (32%) agreed that crisis can be prevented, most of the time. There were 10 respondents (20%) who were neutral and 16 (32%) who disagreed that most of the time, crisis can be prevented. Finally, there were 4 people (8%) who strongly disagreed with that statement.

Statement 6: Companies/businesses usually handle crisis effectively.

In reviewing the results for statement six, not a single person strongly agreed that effective crisis management was a usual practice among companies. There were 11 respondents (22%) who agreed with that statement, 24 people (48%) who felt neutral, and 15 respondents (30%) who disagreed that organizations usually handle crisis effectively. In this case, zero people strongly disagreed.

Statement 7: Communication efforts during a crisis are usually timely and clear.

The results for statement seven were as follows. One person (2%) strongly agreed that communication efforts during a crisis are usually timely and clear. Thirteen respondents (26%) agreed, 11 or 22% felt neutral, but 23 respondents (46%) disagreed that communication efforts are timely and clear. There was one person (2%) who strongly disagreed.

Statement 8: Most people in my company can identify our key stakeholders.

Responses for statement eight were that only 3 respondents (6%) strongly agreed with the statement, “Most people in my company can identify our key stakeholders.” There were 25 (50%) of respondents who agreed with that statement and 8 (16%) who
felt neutral. Thirteen (26%) of respondents disagreed and thought that most in their company could not identify key stakeholders. Only one person (2%) responded strongly disagree.

**Statement 9: Prior to recent events, I was comfortable flying on an airline.**

For this statement, 10 people or 20%, strongly agreed they were comfortable flying prior to recent events. There were 29 respondents (58%) who agreed, 3 respondents (6%) who felt neutral, 7 respondents (14%) who disagreed with the statement, and one person (2%) who was not comfortable flying prior to recent events.

**Statement 10: Following recent events, I am uncomfortable flying on an airline.**

In assessing statement ten, the results are as follows. Seven respondents or 14% strongly agreed that they were uncomfortable flying on an airline following recent events. Twelve people or 24% agreed they were uncomfortable about flying following recent events. Nine respondents (18%) were neutral, but 21 respondents or 42% disagreed that following recent events they are uncomfortable about flying. One person strongly disagreed with this statement.

**Overall Survey Comments or Suggestions**

Generally, there were not many additional comments regarding the surveys. The few which were written gave some additional insight into what employees believe in reference to crisis management.

One survey participant suggested that most companies know they need to improve upon existing policies, procedures, and contingency plans. This respondent believes that organizations must invest financially in plans to keep crisis from occurring and unfortunately, buy in is required at the highest level. If that fails to happen, upper
management must fully understand the ramifications of no action. This was a strong comment and guided in the correct direction in relation to crisis management. Unfortunately, it seems as if many companies are not willing to financially support a crisis management action plan.

Another positive response the author received was regarding personnel at an organization to step up and get involved with disaster recovery. This respondent focuses on the main idea. He says, "Organizations should plan for the worst case crisis." But as another participant mentioned, many organizations may have a plan but are not quite sure how actually to execute it.

That is when practice plays a crucial role. One comment leaned towards the fact that one had to experience a crisis to really know how to handle one and to know if the plan that an organization has is effective or not. The author can say this is true and false. True because learning comes through experience and observation in many cases. False because there were plenty of crises, which were handled effectively and not, previously experienced at all or at those organizations. The Johnson & Johnson product tampering crisis is a great example of that. It was a crisis that was fabulously handled and set many examples for many different companies.

Crisis management is about planning. One respondent says, "The key to effective crisis management is detail planning." This is not possible when crisis planning. To "detail" in the strictest sense of the word would be too time consuming and not effective. One cannot detail every plan simply because not one person knows exactly what is going to occur during a crisis. It is of course worthy to develop the best possible plan but without overdoing it.
Without a doubt, there are many employees at different types of organizations who understand what crisis management entails. The comments exemplified the theory that an organization must be prepared and willing to spend the time and money on developing a plan that is going to suite that organization in whatever crisis they are going to face.

Also, the author believes many employees would be willing to participate in a management plan at their organizations. And even if they could not directly participate, the organization can at least let their employees know there is a plan and the involved parties are prepared if they should ever have to execute it. Many employees may not feel their organizations are prepared because they most likely don’t even know there is a plan in place.

The general comments and suggestions gave the participant to voice what opinions and beliefs they had regarding crisis management. This would be a very valuable tool for an organization to use with their employees to show what the organization needs to educate employees about and even how an employee views the organization which he or she is employed at.

**Survey Conclusions**

Crisis management is an engaging topic for most people. There are many novel, contrasting, outlandish, and creative ideas and opinions on the subject. In this survey, the author discovered some surprising facts as well as not so surprising facts regarding crisis management.

When participants were asked if they thought their organization had a crisis management plan, 48% of the respondents agreed and said they thought their
organizations most likely had crisis management plans. In conjunction with the book, Crisis Management, Planning for the Inevitable, a survey was done involving the nation’s top chief executive officers of the *Fortune* 500. This study found that 50% of the respondents admitted that they did not have a prepared crisis management plan (Fink, 2000, p. 67). The author did think that most respondents would think their place of employment did have a crisis management plan but this just goes to show that is not true and many organizations’ employees think they do.

When a crisis occurs, the spokesperson should be visible, literate, and good under pressure. The participants overwhelmingly, strongly agreed that the CEO or other high-ranking official should be the prime spokesperson during a crisis. Of course, in most cases this is the best idea but sometimes, having the CEO or other vice president may not be seen as a well thought out move. Sixty-four percent of respondents do believe that having a CEO or other high-ranking official should be the prime spokesperson.

The author believes that most employees would like to think that their organization is ready for a crisis, if one should occur. Unfortunately, 50% of those surveyed felt that most organizations are not prepared if a crisis were to occur. This may be because people usually recall those crisis is which there were negative outcomes so to think that most organizations so not have plans is common. As mentioned previously in the study done involving CEO’s of *Fortune* 500 companies, also reported that organizations who did report having a crisis in the past, 42% still do not have any sort of crisis management plan in the event that another crisis hits (Fink, 2000, p. 67). The participants of this survey may be correct in assuming that most companies are not prepared if a crisis was to occur.
Although 50% of respondents felt that most organizations were not prepared if a crisis was to occur, 42% felt that their organization was most likely prepared if a crisis was to occur. This may exemplify that employees have faith and confidence in the organizations they work for. With recent events, such as scandals, layoffs, and the relocation of organizations, this is a positive note. Having employees that believe in the organization they work for is half the battle. If a crisis occurs, these loyal employees are the ones who are going to try their hardest to help the company rise about the crisis.

Most of the time, crisis can be prevented. Thirty-two percent of participants agreed that a crisis can be prevented and 32% disagreed and felt that crisis cannot be prevented. Fortunately, most crises could have been prevented. One of the most crucial steps in crisis management is to understand that taking all steps necessary to hinder a crisis, as the author talks about in chapter 2, is what is going to assist an organization in preventing a crisis, which is 100% possible.

In regards to this survey, there were, as mentioned above, some surprising outcomes as well as some expected ones. It seems as if employees understand the importance of crisis plans and they have the confidence in their organizations to assist in either developing or being part of an actual plan. This is just the beginning. If there is a crisis for example, and one organization says, that can happen to us, does not necessarily mean they will heed that warning. There is much planning, time, and money that will go into crisis planning and by the results of the survey's, it seems that at least employees of organizations realize what a positive impact a well developed plan will do for an organization.

Crisis management is a topic that is very broad and opinionated. There may not be just one right answer for every crisis or one right plan for every crisis. The only option is to continue planning and take advice from others. They may know something that you
have not considered. Also, to fully understand that crisis can happen at any time and will happen at the worst possible time, and just because an organization is prepared, does not mean a crisis can be avoided at all times.
Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the area of crisis management, the difficulty of deciding what the correct step to take during a crisis situation may be the most trying decision anyone in an organization will ever have to make. This is what effective crisis management is all about. If an organization wants to prosper in the 21st century, they must be willing to put the energy, money, and resources into developing a crisis management plan.

As of April 2002, there have been at least two impending and seemingly never-ending crisis plaguing organizations; these are Arthur Andersen and Enron. Any person who has even taken a crisis management class is cringing at all the bad mistakes that Enron and Arthur Andersen did make and are currently making. These situations have gotten way out of hand and because of overlooking or avoidance of simple steps of crisis management; these two organizations will never again be the same. And worse, their names will be synonymous with bad crisis management.

Plans do not have to be developed internally at an organization. There are plenty of organizations, which specialize in developing practical plans for every type of organization and every type of crisis that would be high on the organizations’ crisis management scale. Having an outside organization may be better in the long run because sometimes, it is difficult to disassociate with the organization internally.

There are many different ways and methods to develop an effective plan. This author bought fourth steps, which will assist any organization in at least developing supportive framework for a very effective crisis management plan.

There are many different crisis experts out there. They range from CEO’s of organizations who have handled their own crisis to people who do crisis planning for a
living and what the author likes to call “the others.” These “others” may be employees of
any organization or just people who like to research or are interested in the field of crisis
management.

All of these crisis experts that are out there, have opinions regarding crisis
management. Many of them actually do have similar opinions when suggesting how to
develop plans or handle crisis situations. Although opinions and suggestions may have
been similar, they may have been a difference in the order of steps in managing a crisis or
what was the most important aspect to tackle when a crisis actually happens.

Of course, what may be good for one organization is not going to be good for
another. Publics of one organization to another are different. Therefore, the way they go
about handling communication during a crisis is going to be different. And this goes for
every aspect during a crisis. So, when developing an effective crisis management plan,
one has to make sure that this plan suits the organization. For example, the crisis
management plan for an airline is not going to be the same for a clothing designer
because the industry is different, and most likely, the airline’s crisis is going to involve
the death of customers.

The author believes in some general guidelines for developing an efficacious
crisis management plan. First of all, an organization must figure out which crises are
most likely to occur at their company. This is when the detection phase begins. An
organization can detect a crisis using prodromes, which are previous crisis that any
company may have had that may affect your organization. Next would be to develop a
crisis inventory. In the simplest form, this means making a list of all the crises that could
be possible at XYZ company. After making the list, put them in an order of most likely to
occur to least likely to occur. There are other ways of performing this crisis audit, as the inventory is also called. How a company wants to do it is up to them. In the end, there will be a list with crises that have a high chance of occurring at that organization and also crises, which do not have a high occurrence of happening. Obviously, one is not going to begin crisis preparation for a crisis, which is not likely to occur so the next step is to decide which crisis the organization wants to develop a plan for.

Do not forget to weigh crises that have taken place at other organizations that are in the same business. For example, if you are a tire manufacturer and you have just seen what transpired between Ford and Firestone, you better heed that warning that the same thing could happen to you. This may cause one to take measures to avoid a crisis like this. Maybe it’s adding a clause to the agreement you have with the car manufacturer or making sure if there is a defect in any tire, either party is notified at once. Correcting the problem should be the first and foremost worry. If the problem is addressed at the start, most problems do not get much worse. Of course, if someone is hiding something the plot will thicken. But let’s hope with all this knowledge of crisis management, that will not happen.

To prepare and be prevent. This should be the motto for every organization. The key to handling a crisis is preventing it in the first place. As the author mentioned previously, you can prevent a crisis occurring at your organization by watching it happen at another. But there are other ways to assist in preventing a crisis. The author will mention these briefly because they are thoroughly discussed in chapter two.
Since the author is into mottoes, let's try one here. Treat others, as you want to be treated. This makes perfect sense now that we are older right? Of course it does and in most cases this is true. In crisis management, the relationship you build with everyone the company comes in contact with is crucial. Not only the CEO’s relationships, even the customer service representatives, and the public relations people, and the secretaries. As we all know, when we are in hot water, who is going to bail us out? Most likely, people we have helped in the past and people that like us, and people that think we are a great group of people. If a company does not have good relations with the media for example, prior to a crisis, the media is going to love that your organization now has a crisis and guess what? They are not going to help you and understand when you don’t have all the answers they are looking for. They are going to rip you to shreds and they don’t care whom they talk to, to get the story they want. Don’t forget that community the organization is in. Does the organization donate to any charity in the area? Do employees assist children in the schools with extra help? Does the company hold a whatever town USA day at the company grounds? And does the community know exactly what the organization does and what precautions, if any, the organization is taking to make 100% sure that community is safe? If the answers to any of these questions is no, one may want to bring this up at the next meeting.

Going hand in hand with good relationships is reputation. Most likely, if an organization is practicing most of the above mentioned relationship builders, the organization has a good reputation. If for any reason, the organization does not have a positive reputation with all publics. These are all the groups of people that mean anything
to the survival of the organization. Get moving and correct them. There is no time to
spare in this case. A bad reputation is worse than having no reputation at all.

As the author is still discussing ways in which to prevent and prepare for crisis,
we don’t want to forget signals. Most of the time or 99% of the time, there were signals
which were saying, “Hey look over here, I am shredding all these not supposed to be
shredded documents.” There was not only one person who knew that those documents
were not supposed to be shredded. All employees, from the vice presidents to the people
who work in the mailroom need to understand there is a no tolerance rule for not
reporting illegal or unusual behavior. Do not let things fall through that cracks at any
organization. Every organization should know why the Challenger Space Shuttle actually
exploded and that it could have easily been prevented. That should be the only example
any organization needs to understand the importance of signals.

Are there going to be people afraid to report these signals? Yes, there are going to
be but should they be afraid? No. What is the point of knowing about the importance of
signals if an organization is too uptight to listen to the bowels of the organization? This is
where corporate culture plays a tremendous role. It seems to always amaze me how
certain organizations are so uptight and one would think, “One giggle in my cubicle and I
am out of here.” If this is the case at any organization, most likely employees are not
going to speak up when something fishy is transpiring. To say it simply, have a
comfortable, yet professional and open, yet with boundaries sort of organization. Being
realistic about the boundaries of an organization is crucial. There can be an open
environment at a company while being very professional. If people are afraid, they are
not going to help the organization prior to a crisis, they will just help fuel the fire.
The author believes that preparation and prevention are the most important aspects of managing crises. If a crisis actually arises, the next step is to contain it. Be responsible; admit to the mistake, even if the mistake was not totally the fault of the organization. A good spokesperson should have been chosen previously and they should be ready and prepared to rise to the occasion. Some spokespeople decide that they do not want to go into the spotlight once it’s their time. No organization wants this to happen.

Tell the media what they need to know and if the company does not know the answer to a question, write it down and make sure to tell them at the next press briefing that the answer will be there and make sure it is, if possible of course. The media is most likely the way an organization is going to communicate to some publics. Remember this. This is where good relations play’s a vital role. This is the only chance when the media is at your beckon call, so to speak. At this point, use the media to the advantage of the company.

Concluding Remarks

As the world steps into the 21st century, the crises organizations have are getting bigger and more involved. Many organizations have the same mentality of people. For example, how many times did each of us say, “I won’t get a ticket for speeding,” or “I won’t get cancer.” One doesn’t know that they will not get a speeding ticket or cancer but are hoping they don’t. So, we keep speeding and continue not to take care of ourselves. Until, we get a ticket or someone close to us gets cancer.

Crises do not go away. But there are ways we can avoid them. Read the signs and make an effort to take care of the organization. Crises are stressful, time consuming, money burning, and reputation crushing. The author will leave the reader with one last
thought. As Steven Fink quotes Grantland Rice, “When the One Great Scorer comes to write against your name-He marks-not that you won or lost-but how you played the game” (p.219).

**Author’s Comments**

Crisis Management is a field of study, which has been growing in popularity within the past 20 years. Is this because there are more crisis occurring or because organizations are beginning to realize that a crisis can and most likely will happen to them during the duration of the business?

The answer could be either of those hypotheses. The author decided to research crisis management because crisis planning can be applied to all business’s everywhere. Also, the fact that most crises can be avoided is one of the most interesting facts of crisis management. Columbine, Enron, Watergate, TWA Flight 800, Three Mile Island, the list goes on and on. And to believe that all of these crises could have been avoided is unbelievable. The author hopes to assist organizations to learn that with good skills and planning, any organization can be successful in crisis prevention.

The process of developing steps to create an efficient crisis management plan was tough. Beginning to develop a plan is difficult in itself so with steps to follow, it will make the process flow much better.

In the area of crisis management, there is an abundance of information. There are many people who write about crisis management including CEO’s of organizations to professionals who do crisis management for a living. With all this information, it was very difficult to narrow the inclusion of information into the thesis. There were many incredible stories, views, and ideas from different authors, which the author would have liked to include. For example, when the word crisis is mentioned, do most of us ever
think of a natural disaster as a crisis? The author would have liked to elaborate on the
significance of natural disasters because every single company, business, and
organization can be a victim of a natural disaster. Also, there were a few authors who did
not even mention natural disasters in their overview of crisis.

Additionally, there are so many intriguing crises, which have happened, the
author would have liked to take a crisis and dissect it. This would be beneficial for an
organization that may be a candidate for that same type of crisis. It would exemplify how
a crisis unfolds and what were the steps that organization took to control it or how the
crisis controlled the organization.

The list can go on and on regarding ways in which to exemplify crisis planning.
There are many different and valuable ways to plan, deal, and learn crisis management.
The author chose crisis management because it is a valuable aspect of business to be
knowledgeable about and it can be a part of every organization that exists. The author is
more educated about all areas of crisis management and once anyone who becomes
aware of the importance of crisis planning will be a valuable asset to any organization.
Bibliography


