Internal Communication: It's Role in Effective Crisis Management in an Organization a Study of Taraba State University Jalingo, Taraba State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This is titled *Internal Communication: It's Role in effective crisis management in an organization A Study of Taraba state University Jalingo, Taraba state, Nigeria* was aimed to assess the function of internal communication in crisis management in an organization using the Taraba State University, Jalingo Taraba State Nigeria. The qualitative research and an In-depth interview were used for data collection for the study. This study has discovered that internal communication plays a role in crisis Management in an organization. Clear Communication fosters relationship among staffs, management and stakeholders, with effective communication the goals and principles of the organization can be achieved and sustained. The study also found that communication can be one of the most important determining factors of an organizations success, if an organization has a clear communication strategy crises can be managed or avoided. Furthermore, improper communication can lead to escalating crises, and have damaging reputation on an organization. The study therefore, concluded that internal communication plays a vital role in crises management and clear internal communication strategies and tools can be effective in controlling and averting crises in any organization. In this regard, the study recommended that organizations should pay more attention to communication as it plays a major role in effective crises management.

Keyword: Internal Communication, Crisis Management, Public Relation, Organization, Taraba State University

INTRODUCTION

Today's organizations operate in a complicated and unstable environment where crises can strike without warning and affect operations, reputation, and stakeholder confidence. Significant hurdles must be overcome during crises, necessitating quick decisions, coordinated action, and good communication. Internal communication is essential for allowing information flow, bringing staff together, preserving employee morale, and can be used to enable successful crises management tactics. Organizations' internal communication procedures have a significant impact on their capacity to deal with and recover from crises. Therefore, for organizations looking to improve their crisis preparedness and resilience, knowing the role of internal communication in effective crises management is essential.

Statement of the Problem

Every organization may occasionally experience a crisis situation, and how those situations are handled can have a significant impact on the business's success, staff morale, and reputation. In these situations, effective internal communication is crucial to keeping employees informed, interested, and inspired in manage the crises. An organized reaction that includes internal communications inside the organization is necessary for effective crises management. Internal communication, which is the exchange of knowledge, concepts, and messages within the walls of an organization, is crucial to crises management, it is essential for effective decision-making,

information sharing, and teamwork among workers, teams, and management. In order to increase the organization's capacity to respond to crises in the future, this study aims to investigate how internal communication plays a role in crises management in an organization study of Taraba State University, Jalingo, Taraba State in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The research's objective is to assess Taraba State University's current internal communication strategy, identify its benefits, roles and offer suggestions for improvement. Specifically, the study seeks to:

i. Evaluate the degree to which internal communication assists in managing and preventing crisis in an organization;

ii. Identify the internal communication strategies and tools used by Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria in addressing the crises, and

iii. Identify the causes of some of the crises.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Internal communication

By efficiently communicating with employees, serving as a valuable asset to the company, and cultivating a feeling of community, internal communication serves to increase corporate value (Verghese (2017, p. 104). The internal audience is the most essential for the communicator, and effective internal communication can eliminate uncertainty and rumors, serve as a catalyst for change, it also helps to improve internal relationships and instill knowledge of environmental change. (Verghese 2017 p. 104).

According to Kalla, 2005; Yates, 2006; Dortok, 2006, Welch and Jackson, 2007 and White, Vanc and Stafford, 2010, as cited in Verghese 2017, p.105 The image of an organization can be improved, knowledge can be shared, trust can be gained, a sense of belonging can be instilled, awareness can be raised, and employees may be engaged by effective communication. Internal communication is a term used to refer to "all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organisation." (Kalla, 2005 as cited in Verghese 2017, p.105). Internal communication, which is multidisciplinary by nature, can be positioned between human resources management, public relations, and (internal) marketing. In reality, nevertheless, practitioners in public relations and strategic communication have the best grasp of internal stakeholders (Tkalac Veri & poljari, 2020 as cited in Men. 2021 p. 2).

According to Barreto (2020 p. 135) Organizations define themselves as systems that evolve by means of their internal communication networks and undergo ongoing change Because it enables the processing of interactions with the environment, ensures the flow of information and understanding, and fosters the necessary cohesion for the organization's efficient operation. Internal communication must always take center stage in any organization to make judgments and implement the proper work practices, internal communication is crucial. Only an efficient internal communication system enables an effective reaction to pressure from outside sources. (Barreto 2020 p. 135).

From the discussion above, it is obvious that internal communication policies must be created and connected with the organization's policies in order for an organization to operate efficiently. This is due to the fact that workers must be informed about company developments in order for the introduction of new approaches to the workplace to go smoothly and amicably. As Silva 1969: p. 56 as cited in Barreto 2020:p. 136 noted, that internal communication policy's objective is to "create a two-way network between management and employees, where ideas, orders, suggestions, and complaints can be distributed."

Therefore, effective internal communication should inform superiors about the attitudes and behaviors of subordinates, foster team participation and interest in the organization's present and future, disclose fundamental policies and management, motivate feelings of pride in being a part of the organization, promote interest in

ongoing tasks, and develop a spirit of loyalty, cooperation, and understanding (Idem, 1969: p. 14, Barreto 2020: p. 136).

Crises and Crises Management

There are numerous interpretations of the word crisis, to decide what to do in a crisis situation, crisis managers and leaders are guided by these meanings. Since we talk about "managing" a crisis although in reality each crisis situation is quite unique by itself, it is also an interesting applied topic (Mensah, 2020, p. 14). According to Coombs (2007, p. 2), A crisis is the perception of an unforeseen incident that endangers significant stakeholder expectations, has a detrimental impact on an organization's performance, and leads to undesirable results, this term combines many viewpoints on crises Although unpredictable, a crisis is not unforeseen; prudent organizations are aware that they will experience one at some point; they simply do not know when. According to Simola (2014 as cited in Mensah 2020, p.15), the fact that the notion of crisis management has so many different qualities and is so diverse in its nature is the cause of the disagreement over its precise definition. Simola 2014 as cited in Mensah 2020, p.15 claims that the rarity, significance, significant effect, ambiguity, urgency, and high stakes that define a crisis.

Crisis management refers to a collection of strategic and well-planned actions that an organization takes to either prevent a crisis from occurring or to lessen the negative effects a crisis may have on its operations as Coombs 2007 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 18 puts it, crisis management is key to reputation management as well, the reputation of an organization hinges heavily on the organization's ability to manage crisis situations effectively. The inability of the organization to prevent or manage crisis situations leads to a serious reputation distortion. In the word of Coombs (2007, p. 8), "Reputational assets are threatened by crises." As reputation is given more importance, crisis management must also receive more attention in order to safeguard reputational assets.

A collection of strategies known as crisis management are intended to prevent crises and decrease the actual harm done. In other words, it aims to safeguard the organization, stakeholders, and industry from harm by preventing or reducing the negative effects of a crisis. Emergency preparedness gave rise to crisis management, which now consists of four interconnected elements: prevention, preparation, reaction, and revision Coombs 2014: p 3. The four elements of crisis management as explained by Coombs 2014: p 5 is as follows:

Prevention: The actions made to avert catastrophes are referred to as prevention or mitigation. Crisis managers frequently spot early warning indicators and then take steps to avert the problem (Coombs 2014: p 5).

Preparedness: Preparation is the part of crisis management that is most well-known and involves the crisis management plan (CMP), the CMP is the tip of the crisis management iceberg Contrary to popular assumption, most of the crisis management process is concealed, The components of preparation include identifying crisis vulnerabilities, selecting and training a crisis management team and spokespersons, creating a crisis portfolio, and enhancing a crisis communication system (Coombs 2014: p. 5). Response is putting the components of preparation to use in a crisis; a crisis could either be real or fake (like in an exercise) it is necessary to examine the preparation's components on a regular basis (Coombs 2014: p. 5).

Response: implies applying the elements of preparation to a crisis is response, a crisis may be actual or simulated as in an exercise regular testing of the preparation's components is required (Coombs 2014: p 5). In order to assess the preparedness of the CMP, crisis team members, spokespersons, and communication system, testing comprises conducting simulated crises and drills, the same crisis management tools must be used in a real crisis, but the results are actual rather than hypothetical, When there is a real catastrophe, the response is quite public (Coombs 2014: p 5) Solutions are designed to lessen the crisis's negative consequences on stakeholders and the organization when it really arises In other words, the response helps achieve the crisis management objectives, The key crisis communication objectives that organizations want to mitigate include the threat to public safety, reputational harm, brand damage, and sales loss, There is even a chance that the response will lead to benefits such as a stronger organization, a more successful brand, a better reputation, and organizational changes that make the workplace safer. (Coombs 2014: p 5) Another aspect of response is Recovery, which refers to an organization's efforts to resume regular operations as quickly as feasible after a disaster, is a component of the reaction. The term "business continuity" refers to the efforts to return operations to normal as already mentioned,

downtime caused by a crisis is expensive, An organization will suffer less financial losses the faster it can resume normal operations (Coombs 2014: p 5).

Revision: Entails assessing the organization's response to hypothetical and actual crises, identifying what went well and poorly during its crisis management performance (Coombs 2014: p 5). The organization makes changes to its preventative, planning, and response strategies as a result of this discovery ideally; the correct actions are repeated while the mistakes are avoided in the future. The ideal outcome is that in the future the correct decisions are repeated and the errors are avoided and changed to better course-of-action by enhancing the organization's perspective of crises and its capacity for response, revision, which is the formation of an institutional or organizational memory, can increase the effectiveness of crisis management (Li, YeZhuang, & Ying, 2004; Weick, 1988 as cited in Coombs 2014: p 5). An organization's ability to handle similar circumstances in reality improves with the quantity and variety of crises it encounters during training sessions. The elements are interconnected in a spiral. In the event that prevention is unsuccessful, performance must be prepared for. Performance-based revision informs both crisis prevention and preparation for the future. Enhancing preparation should also enhance reaction (Coombs 2014: p 5).

Coombs 2014: p 6 is of the notion that crises have a recognizable life cycle is a recurrent issue in the literature on crisis management, This life cycle necessitates understanding on the part of the crisis manager because each stage calls for a different course of action. Coombs 2014: p 6 referred to the life cycle as phased approaches to crisis management. A staged method means that the crisis management process is broken down into distinct parts and carried out in a particular sequence furthermore, the life cycle viewpoint makes clear that effective crisis management must be incorporated into an organization's regular business processes (Coombs 2014: p 6). Crisis management involves more than just creating a plan and carrying it out when a crisis arises instead, it should be seen as a continuous process every day; employees of an organization may be looking for possible crises, preventing them, or thinking about any of the crisis management procedures included in this book. Many people should have full-time jobs in crisis management in an organization (Coombs 2014: p 6).

The organization's cross-functional crisis management team (CMT) is a key component of crisis planning and has been assigned to handle any crisis, Finding the people who are most qualified to work on the CMT is the easiest part of choosing the crisis team (Mensah 2020 p. 18). The requirement that certain organizational functional areas be represented on the CMT complicates the selection process the functional approach is the most important selection criterion in publications on crisis management, the crisis team's membership should correspond to the crisis's characteristics (Weddle, 2001 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 18).

Public relations practitioners are an integral part of crisis management teams. As Mani (2008 as cited in Mensah 2020 p, 18) explains crisis management as the method used by organizational leaders to prepare for, respond to, and lessen the effects of a crisis. Crisis management encompasses a variety of elements, such as techniques for responding to both the reality and perception of crises; metrics for determining which situations qualify as crises and, therefore, should activate the necessary response mechanisms and communication that takes place during the response phase of emergency management scenarios Mensah 2020 p. 18).

In the same vein, Coombs (2014, p 47) designed a more encompassing model with three stages that addresses all types of emergencies. The three phases of the approach to crisis management are pre-crisis (which refers to prevention), crisis response (which refers to incident management), and post-crisis (which refers to applying the lessons learned to prepare for subsequent crises) Despite being less comprehensive, the concept is easier to understand and applicable to every crisis situation.

The 3-Phase Model Approach to Crises Management

The most well-known and possibly more applicable frameworks for the management of crises have arisen in the 1990s within the context of model or framework development the majority of these modular frameworks have either followed a three stage (Richardson, 1994 as cited in mensah 2020 p. 20), four stage (Myers, 1993; Fink, 1996 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 20) and five stage (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 20) method, with the former dominating literature in the present. In fact, all theories consider a crisis to be phenomena with a beginning, an end, and the potential for rebirth rather than an occurrence As a result, a cyclical

structure for crisis management was built into all techniques. However, the 3 stage technique will serve as the theoretical foundation for the remainder of this study.

According to Smith (1990 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 21) and Coombs (1999b as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 21) the most appropriate basic framework in literature concerning crisis management is the three-stage approach. Coombs (1999b as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 21) describes this model as a macro-stage approach that can further be used to analyze many other models of crisis management. Thus, all the other approaches i.e. Fin's (1986 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 21 four-stage and Mitroff's (1994 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 21) five-stage approach as well as many other approach variations are borne out of the three stage approach. The three-stage approach follows the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis format.

The Pre-Crisis Stage

According to Smith 1990 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 21, the pre-crisis stage of crisis management mainly focuses on what he refers to as the crisis of management. Smith claims that the management problem is related to the behaviors of organizational leaders, organizational culture, etc. that don't prioritize readiness. A trigger event is all that is necessary to start a crisis scenario in the organization since there is a lack of organizational readiness (Mensah 2020 p. 21). Smith's claim is that organizational leaders' lack of readiness is what causes the pre-crisis stage. According to Richardson (1994 Mensah 2020 p. 21), the pre-crisis stage entails measures taken to ward off dangers that could trigger crises. Similar to earlier writers' observations, more modern writers characterize the pre-crisis period Mensah 2020 p. 21.

The pre-crisis stage involves steps that need to be taken before a crisis arises Members of the organization must nonetheless be prepared for crises because not all of them can be avoided. The majority of crises do give out early indicators; these situations can be prevented by taking quick action (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1995 as cited in Coombs 2014 p. 47). Crisis managers must locate potential sources of warning indicators, gather information about them, and conduct an analysis of the data, a pattern in consumer complaints, for instance, could reveal a product flaw Corrective action might be conducted if the complaints are reported to the organization's appropriate manufacturing division (Coombs 2014 p. 47). The subsequent corrective action might avoid additional complaints as well as the possibility of a widely   publicized recall, a conflict with customers, or both, a mechanism for anticipating possible crises and responding to them must be developed by crisis managers As soon as the potential is identified, steps must be made to avert the emergency (Coombs 2014 p. 47) Issues management, risk management, and reputation management are the three types of preventative measures. According to Boudreaux 2005 as cited in Mensah 2020, p. 21, managing issues entails taking measures to stop a problem from developing into a crisis Risk levels are reduced or eliminated via risk management.

Crisis Events

The operational crisis stage is another name for the crisis stage. At this point, the crisis takes on concrete form and starts to function (Smith, 1990 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 21). Andrianopolous (2015, p. 5 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 21) writes that "when avoidance efforts fail and a crisis is triggered, the organization goes into "crisis mode" and enters the response phase, which is characterized by short decision times, complexity, and ambiguity since there is still a risk of immediate damage." Organizational initiatives aimed at fostering supportive environments among the crisis situation's stakeholders define this stage (Mensah 2020 p. 22). When a crisis occurs, an organization shifts its focus to creating organizational procedures that will enable the affected stakeholders to continue operating normally (Mensah 2020 p. 22). According to Boudreaux (2005 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 22), the organization engages in actions such as reputation management, the dissemination of information and messages to convey about the issue, and the recognition of crises.

This phase starts with a crisis trigger event, which kicks off the crisis. An organization's crisis planning is put to the test when a real crisis arises (Coombs 2014 p. 146). When the crisis is deemed to have been resolved, the crisis stage is over, crises are both objective and symbolic on whether a situation is a crisis, people may disagree. Some crises are difficult to see, especially those that involve conflicts with outside parties an organization might not even be aware that it is in a crisis, bizarre as it may sound (Kamer, 1996 as cited in Coombs 2014 p. 146). When significant parties agree that a situation is a crisis, it is considered a crisis, even when stakeholders are

screaming that the organization is in a crisis, some members of management may regrettably want to deny that it even exists (Fink, Beak, & Taddeo, 1971; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992 as cited in Coombs 2014 p. 146). In a similar vein, management might decline to respond to warning indicators with preventative measures three factors affect how serious a crisis is: perceived salience, immediacy, and uncertainty (Coombs 2014 p. 147). Similar to warning indications, actual crises vary in the potential loss and likelihood of loss if the CMP is not implemented if nothing is done, harm may eventually trickle out to other parts of the organization, the local community, and other stakeholders (Coombs 2014 p. 147). For instance, if a product harm issue is not controlled, fire or hazardous gas could spread to other areas of a facility or the surrounding neighborhood, and stockholders could suffer as a result.

Perceived salience fluctuates depending on the magnitude of the potential loss (impact) and the possibility of the loss (likelihood); it is related to the crisis assessment dimensions of effect and likelihood, The perceived significance of a crisis for managers increases with the size of the potential loss or likelihood of loss (Billings et al., 1980; Dutton, 1986 as cited in Coombs 2014 p. 148).

The term "immediacy" refers to the crisis's time-sensitive nature; the two aspects of time pressure are (1) the imminence of the crisis and (2) the level of stakeholder pressure to respond (Coombs 2014 p. 148). The more immediate a crisis is, the sooner it can cause harm. A modified product that puts customers' lives in peril is more urgent than an activist group's original claim of moral transgressions; People are immediately in risk from a modified product, whereas moral infractions typically involve philosophical discussions (Coombs 2014 p. 148). A problem's degree of ambiguity is its level of uncertainty, the more vagueness there is surrounding a situation, the more uncertain it is, People are attracted to and need to eliminate uncertainty, the same applies to organizations (Dutton, 1986 as cited in Coombs 2014 p. 149) Organizations need to understand what is happening and why in their operations, If a problem is not understood, how can it be fixed? Common organizational principles and processes can be used to explain and fix low-uncertainty issues. According to Coombs 2014 p. 149 Problems with a high degree of uncertainty call for the kind of extra care that crisis management can provide, the effectiveness of ambiguity is best demonstrated by comparing similar crises. Crisis managers must acknowledge that the organization is in a crisis during the crisis occurrence and take the necessary steps there are two stages within this phase: crisis containment and crisis recognition. Stakeholder communication is a crucial aspect of this phase. Stakeholders are reached through the words and deeds of an organization (Coombs 2014 p. 149).

Therefore Organizational members must recognize the presence of a crisis and act accordingly, Understanding how situations are classified and acknowledged as crises, how to convince management that a crisis exists, and how to gather information about crises are all part of crisis recognition.

Post Crisis

When actions taken to lessen and communicate the crisis have been successful and the organization is on the mend, the final stage of the approach—the post-crisis stage—begins. This phase is distinguished by making sure the crisis is over, reassuring the public and other stakeholders of the organization's security, and, most importantly, taking lessons from the crisis event (Boudreaux, 2005 as cited in Mensah 2020 p.22). Restoring stakeholder confidence in the organization is one of the most important tasks to complete during the post-crisis stage of crisis management, according to Richard (1994 as cited in Mensah 2020 p.22). According to his theory, crisis situations frequently undermine stakeholder trust, allegiance, and appeal. Therefore, after the crisis has passed, steps must be done to win back any trust, loyalty, and confidence that may have been lost Mensah 2020 p.22. On the other side, Coombs (2011 as cited in Mensah 2020 p.22) contends that this stage is essentially a recovery stage and that recovery for organizations takes place in this stage in two main ways. Both internal and external rehabilitation are absolutely necessary. According to Coombs as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 22, internal recovery mainly entails internalizing the lessons from the crisis occurrence whereas external recovery is resolving the situation outwardly Mensah 2020 p.22. Thus an organization must decide what to do after a crisis is addressed and deemed to be over. Post-crisis activities assist in ensuring that stakeholders have a favorable image of the organization's crisis management efforts, that the crisis is actually finished, and that the organization is better prepared for the next crisis.

According to Coombs 2014 p. 210, Three (3) categories of post-crisis tasks can be made: assistance with investigations, follow-up communication, and crisis tracking. The crisis response team must be certain to assist with any inquiries; Cooperation fosters goodwill with the involved government authorities and shows other stakeholders that the company is transparent and sincere. The subject of follow-up communication is brought up by openness (Coombs 2014 p. 210).

According to Coombs 2014 p. 210 The phase of crisis recovery is extended by follow-up communication so therefore, Crisis managers sustain a healthy organization-stakeholder connection by continuing to provide updates to stakeholders after the crisis has passed and by responding to new requests.

Public Relations and Crisis Management

There are gamut of literatures that established a relationship between internal communication and crisis management. For instance, Ansharah and Awamiri (2021, p. 1), studied on public relations strategy analysis crisis communications. According to the study, crisis communication is the sharing of information by an organization with its constituents both during and after a crisis. Both a descriptive methodology and a qualitative method were used in the investigation. Data collection methods included documentation, interviewing, and observation. The purpose of the study was to perform an empirical investigation into the use of techniques and the enabling and obstructive factors in public relations crisis communication. The results of this study revealed that in order to handle public reaction and prevent a drawn-out crisis communication, a crisis communication plan should be appropriate and prompt. Communication in Emergency Situations Public Relations is in charge of pre-crisis management, specifically during the planning stage, which entails the creation of a Public Relations team in charge of disseminating information, a clean-up and executive summary formation team, and Crisis-Response, specifically during the manufacturing stage. Press conferences and the distribution of publications are also used to improve things in the short and long term through programs. Press releases, clarifications, establishing stakeholder and media relations, and finally Post-Crisis, which is the advancement of public relations not only to improve the company's image but also to improve performance.

Ushie, (2021, p.2) did a study on crisis management and public relations techniques at the Federal College of Education in Obudu. This study focuses on the interactions between FCE, Obudu, and the students, with a special focus on the use of public relations as a crisis management tool. Without a doubt, crises will occur in every human community. The main focus of this study, which we locate under the Issues Management Theory and social responsibility theory, is the methods used by FCE, Obudu to establish and maintain friendly relationships and integration. 390 respondents, made up of employees and students, were surveyed using the survey method, with the interview and questionnaire was utilized as the instruments. The results, among others, imply that more public relations methods should be used to improve a good reputation because communication is the heart of any organization. The researcher advises the FCE, Obudu Public Relations Department to establish a practical and effective approach to promoting good community relations, cooperating social responsibilities, effective communication, encouraging PR staff to take refresher courses, and implementing more effective strategies.

In another separate study, Mensah (2020, p.6) Examining the fundamental tasks and responsibilities of public relations within the three stage method to resolving crises, this study looked at public relations and crisis management in government organizations. Organizations must have public relations (PR) departments. In order to promote communication between top management and their internal and external publics, institutions heavily rely on the roles played by Public Relations. The Public Relation industry's core competencies are the management of communication channels and communication between enterprises and their publics. An essential PR task in businesses is handling crisis situations. Given the potential for organizational destruction caused by crisis events, PR's engagement in this situation is even more vital. The study focuses on how PR aids in crisis management for government organizations. Understanding the role of public relations in addressing crises inside government institutions is the study's main objective, with a focus on the three-stage crisis management model. The study makes the case that in order to better comprehend the function of PR in crisis management, it is essential to recognize the roles that PR plays in each level of the three-stage approach. The study, which utilized secondary data gathered from electronic journals, documents, books, and other sources, was a desk research effort. According to the study, PR is extremely important during the pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis phases of

the three-stage crisis management method. The study shows that research, internal crisis communication, image/reputation repair, and training are among the main duties PR carries out in crisis situations.

Theoretical Framework

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

Zamoum and Gorpe (2018 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 23) assert that there is a close relationship between the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) and the theory and practice of public relations. Several studies in public relations that have concentrated on crises and issues management have taken the situational crisis communication theory into account. The SCCT was developed by W. Timothy Coombs, a professor of communication studies at the University of Eastern Illinois. Coombs first proposed the idea in his 1995 article "Choosing the Right Words: The Development of Guidelines for the Selection of the "Appropriate" Crisis Response Strategies. However, the theory did not assume the name 'Situational Crisis Communication Theory' (SCCT) until 2002 (Coombs and Holladay, 2002 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 23). Prior to the change of name, the theory was commonly referred to as "the Symbolic Approach to Crisis Management and Communication" (Coombs 1995, p. 447; 1998, p. 177). Weiner 1986 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 23) and Coombs (2007b as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 23) posit that, the SCCT has roots in the Attribution theory. The attribution theory looks at how people interpret events. People try to make sense of crisis situations by figuring out why they happened and, more significantly, by assigning blame to specific people or groups of people. The key tenet of the attribution theory is that, in the case of a crisis, people—most likely the organization's publics—seek to identify the issue's root cause. (Wise, 2004 and Coombs 2010 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 23). The SCCT, which is based on the Attribution theory, contends that organizations should strategically approach crises based on understanding of how the public assigns blame for a crisis event. Therefore, if the public believes that a crisis occurrence was more purposeful, then they give the organization more of the blame; but, if they believe that the event was inadvertent, then they give the organization less of the blame (Coombs, 2010 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 24).

Additionally, SCCT comprises of three crucial components that are at the foundation of the theory. A system for matching crisis situations with crisis response strategies is one of them (Coombs 2006c, p. 243). The other two are the crisis situation and the crisis response strategies. By creating a system that fits the crisis condition and the crisis response methods, the theory essentially creates a relationship between the crisis scenario and the crisis response techniques. According to Kyhn (2008, p. 23), a crisis manager can select the best course of action by comprehending the crisis scenario. SCCT is an effort to comprehend, clarify, and offer guidelines for crisis communication. The SCCT has undergone tremendous development throughout time, much like many other theories. The composition of the theory's essential components was improved in 2007, and since then, it has served as the foundation for the majority of studies related to it (Kyhn, 2008 as referenced in Mensah 2020, p. 24). The remainder of this section focuses on the theory's refined key components.

Crisis Situation: Coombs (2007b as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 24) says that the type of the problem is what the crisis management is most concerned about in this situation. The public's perspective, not the organization's, is taken into account when determining the sort of crisis. Therefore, the crisis manager in this situation must take into account how the media, stakeholders, and—perhaps most crucially—the general public are defining the crisis. Coombs 2002, p. 179, discovered three separate clusters of the sorts of crisis situation after going over the varieties of crisis numerous times via the theory's refinement stage. They are the victim cluster, the accidental cluster, the preventable cluster, and the third cluster. The clusters are organised in a manner that shows a progression of crisis responsibility and reputational damage (Coombs and Holladay 2002: 179-180 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 25). Coombs notes that the 'victim cluster' refers to crises that happen without the organization's fault. They typically have no bearing on how the organization runs but do have an impact. Natural disasters, tampered products, unfounded rumors about the companies, and instances of coworker violence are a few of the frequent examples. Additionally, they evoke the strongest sympathy from the audience of the organization. When stakeholders protest that an organization is acting improperly, a crisis known as an "accidental cluster" occurs. A technological or technical failure that results in an accident for the industry, a technological failure that results in an accident, or a failure in product quality that results in the firm recalling the product are also involved. Coombs and Halladay (2002 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 25) Describe how the organization did not intend for

this cluster to exist. The Preventive Cluster of crises, on the other hand, is largely deliberate, leading to a high level of crisis attribution to the organization. Industrial accidents, product or service failures, and organizational errors are the main causes of these issues. Preventive cluster crises are extremely challenging to handle and provide a major reputational risk to organizations.

Crisis Response Strategies: According to Coombs (1995 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 25), Crisis management tactics include messages aimed at repairing a company's reputation. Coombs provides a corporation with five (5) basic crisis management strategies. They include strategies that use pain, ingratiation, humiliation, estrangement, non-existence, and remoteness. Non-existence techniques seek to solve the issue by showing that there is no connection between the fictitious crisis and the organization. The non-existence strategy employs a few tactics to keep the organization isolated from the issue. In contrast to denial, which simply argues that nothing happened, clarification attempts to explain why there isn't a crisis The company may also adopt the Attack method, which only involves confronting those who mistakenly assert that a crisis is unfolding. Intimidation is when the corporation threatens to use its authority as an organization against a specific person, such as by taking legal or physical action (Coombs 1995 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 26). The techniques used to distance themselves from the organization while downplaying their connection to the problem acknowledge the dilemma and contribute to its wider acceptance. Excuse attempts to minimise corporate accountability for the catastrophe by denying intention and/or choice. Justification seeks to lessen the harm brought on by the circumstance. The group makes an effort to convince the public that the situation is not as bad as it appears, maybe by making comparisons to prior crises of a similar sort. Examples of justification strategies include downplaying the seriousness of an injury, claiming that the victim deserves what happened, and claiming that the crisis occurrence has been misrepresented (Coombs 1995, p. 451). In order to gain the public's favor, ingratiation strategies link the organization to things that people regard highly. Bolstering works to bring the organization's current virtues to the attention of the public. Transcendence attempts to place the problem within a more comprehensive, desirable perspective. Additionally, flattery of others is used to win over the target (Coombs 1995, p. 452). The employment of mortification techniques aims to win the public's pardon and encourage acceptance of the issue. Remediation is the voluntary provision of aid or payment to victims. Repentance consists of expressing regret for the circumstance and asking for forgiveness. Something needs to be done to prevent the issue from occurring again in order to make it right (Coombs 1995 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 27). The suffering technique aims to generate compassion from the audience by portraying the organization as the unjustly unfortunate victim of some bad, outside power (Coombs 1995 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 27).

It is important to remember that an organization must convey the same message to all of its stakeholders in order to convey coherence, credibility, and ethics. The reality and uniqueness of an organization, which is inextricably linked to its external and internal image and reputation through corporate communication, is known as its corporate identity. The entire community may be impacted if one of these components is compromised (Gray and Balmer, 1998 as cited in Mensah 2020 p. 27).

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research and an In-depth interview were used for data collection for the study. The study's target population, which it attempts to examine or assist, is the population of interest was Taraba State University Jalingo, Nigeria. The study profit from thorough participant input because the findings enhanced by the participants' diverse experiences, cognitive processes, and philosophical viewpoints. In order to evaluate the impact internal communication plays in crisis management at the Taraba state University, Jalingo, the proposed study would employ a qualitative case study technique.

Our research is appropriate for a case study, and according to Yin (2009, p. 8), the How, What, and Why inquiries may be most useful when looking for explanations or causal connections. The case study approach is suited for this study given the difficulty of the research issue and the requirement to explore it. The effectiveness of feedback systems, the nature of communication, employee participation and involvement, enhanced communication and simplicity, communication tactics, and the impact of these internal communication-related elements on crisis management were covered. In order to gather the necessary information for the study, five members of the institution's crisis management team—who are made up of staff members from a variety of

departments—were interviewed in an organized manner. Additionally, the interview allowed for certain open-ended questions, giving respondents more freedom to react without being constrained by predefined replies. Online interviews were conducted, and the data were analyzed thematically to identify significant themes and trends.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses field interviews data in connection to the study's objectives in the following ways:

What internal communication strategies/tools are used in addressing crises among Taraba state University employees in Nigeria?

The study's data showed that there are tools and strategies that are used by Taraba State University, Jalingo to address crisis

Participants have acknowledge the existence of a number of crises in the institution from inception, Every time there are issues that could result in crisis, there are a number of strategies put in place to either manage the crisis or preventing the crisis from happening, Crisis, the University developed a specialized crisis management team to address all the crisis the University faces.

Dr. Atando Dauda

Dean student affairs-Chairman of the committee

Dr. Ato Reuben

Chairman academic staff union Taraba State University Jalingo- Secretary of the committee

Mr. Salvation Ishaya Oudauma

Lecturer Public Relations Department- public relations officer (PRO)

Mr. Hope Daniel Vyonku

Public relations consultant Member of the committee

Mr. Peter Bako

Non Academic staff Registrar- member of the committee

Taraba State University uses email communication as its main method of information dissemination during times of crisis. Instructions to staff, safety procedures, and formal notifications are majorly sent through an email. The first strategy is for the committee members to convene and discuss an impending crisis before sending letters to management that are signed by their Executives outlining the outcome of the meeting and possible steps that can be taken to prevent an outbreak of the crisis. This outcome would be sent to the management through an email sometimes a letter. The same channel will be used by the management to respond to the committee. The response of the management would determine if a meeting would be called by the committee again, depending on the complexity of the crisis, in times of emergency, the university administration may arrange in-person meetings to address the concerns. This meeting is called either using the university official email with the subject EMERGENCY or a phone call would be put across to the individuals that their attention is needed to talk about an emergency. This information is carefully selected and passed in a subtle manner to avoid rumors and passing of wrong information therefore coursing further chaos.

"In managing a crisis, clear and timely communication is essential. The committee makes an effort to answer questions honestly, resolve concerns, and keep lines of communication open with all parties involved. Effective

communication promotes trust among staff and students and reduces misunderstanding, rumors, and panic". Dr Atando Dauda, August 2023

The participants also note that some crisis can involve students and gave example with the crisis situation with the students, "We are aware that students have grievances and concerns such as problems with increment on tuition fee and accommodation fee that coursed a stir amongst students, if not appropriately handled, could have led to a crisis or confrontation. The Student Union Government and Departmental Student Association, is made available to the students to channel their complaints. This is how the students communicate their complaints to the management" Dr Atando Dauda August 2023.

Typically, the Student Union Government which is a union that represents the students would send a letter to the management via the Student Affairs Division outlining what they needed from the school management in order to avoid a crisis or confrontation. The management team and the committee are informed of this in writing by the Dean of Student Affairs.

The management has the option of responding to the Student Union using the same route of communication or by inviting the Student Union Executive to a meeting alongside with the committee. If the management does not satisfy the students' requests, a crisis may develop. For example "one time the students sought a solution to a problem, but the management took so long to respond, the students turned their demand into protest which was one time eventually hijacked by thugs and resulted in property destruction. In trying to resolve the conflict at the time, we discovered that there was a communication breakdown between the management personnel and the students. That is why it is important to clarify information, and get feedback from staff members represented by the head of departments and deans of faculties, head of university Unions including the students union.

A participant also added that in similar cases when the situation is already a full blown crisis, the Management does call a meeting with these committee executives to discuss potential solutions to the looming situation. And if the committee is happy with the strategies or actions that management has ruled out, the committee thereby holds a meeting to analyze the strategy and discuss further on how to carry out the planed action and avoid further occurrence of this crisis. If the committee agrees with the management's plan and come up with a strategy or action, they would continue with any intended actions that are planned.

Participants also observe that when a risk is identified, the committee meets and develop a contingency plan in advance, create emergency response protocols, make use of the available communication channels and conduct regular drills and meetings to make sure everyone is prepared. internal Memos and Circulars has also been identified by the participants as another tool the team has used in times of emergency, the university distributes internal memos and circulars to all staff members to distribute crucial information, updates to policies, and directives. These memos are sent to all media outlets in the state to provide accurate and timely information to the public. "These circulars and memos are also used as a tool to reach out to students in case of emergency, these circulars are places in strategic areas in the school making it difficult for students to avoid and this tool I most add has lasted the taste of time" Salvation Oudauma August 2023. This participant also emphasized on the importance of clear and understandable communication, because of this timely Workshops and training on preparedness is held to train staffs in sessions and workshops for staff to improve their crisis preparedness and communication abilities.

The team also recently introduced the use of social media to reach out to internal and external publics of the university most importantly the students and parents of students and intended applicants giving useful information about the institution. The institution has created social media accounts on twitter @ Taraba state University, on facebook @ Taraba State University and whatsapp groups where staff members can obtain information from the management in both crises and non-crises situation. In times of crisis, usually the social media is the fastest platform for both students and staffs as social media tend to be one of the new generation media now.

The participant also added that the institution set up feedback channels as a strategy to ascertain how effective the team is on crises management this strategy is set up so that staff members can voice their opinions, make recommendations, and assess the success of crisis communication strategies and also help the team to improve

in the future "Now when it comes to communication amongst staffs, the management, students and the committee inclusive, it is a delicate matter because the severity of the crisis depends on how it is communicated and understood as well" Mr Hope Daniel Vyonku August 2023, He went ahead to define "Internal communication as the communication within an organization, between departments within an organization, or between management and staff in this case the students of the institution are part of this internal communication" By using the word 'between' it makes it a Two-way communication, to foster and sustains ties of mutual understanding between management and employees it is essential to have a functional internal communication strategies in any organization, excellent relationships start with effective internal communications.

To what extent has internal communication helped in managing and preventing crises in Taraba State University, Nigeria?

Evidence in this study indicates that internal communication plays an important role in preventing or managing any crisis. This study discovers that prompt and effective internal communication has contributed to more successful crisis management within the university. Crisis guidelines and instructions that were clearly communicated have sped up and improved the institutions effectiveness and also helped in achieving most of the goals of the institution. Communication is key and a lifeline in any organization or institution that wants to succeed, therefore, effective internal communication has helped in preparing and fostering a culture of readiness, internal communication strategies has helped to avoid some crises and managed most of the crises. Internal communication has helped the institution to have a more prepared internal public through clarity, transparency and consistency in communication of safety policies in line with the values of the institution, and so internal communication has proven to be one of the most effective ways to manage and prevent any crises situation.

The participants gave an instance of a crisis situation that was not contained and it escalated to a protest, the crisis was caused when the management increased tuition fee, despite the agitation of the student and several meetings and the attempt of the management to explain the reasons for the increment was not fruitful and a group of students marched in protest through the town of Jalingo in Taraba state down to the government house building. The group of protesters who made it to the government building is responsible for damaging some properties on their way. These groups of students were called back to school by the management through the student's union government mostly through circulars and memos an emergency meeting was held with the committee this meeting was set up through phone calls and emails were sent to the individuals responsible to make the meeting a success including the student's representative for a dialog, after the meeting which ended well and a memorandum of understanding were signed by the management and the student's representative and the further occurrence of such was avoided. The quick, proactive, and clear communication throughout this situation prevented it from worsening into something far more serious than it was.

The participants also added that internal communication has also helped in managing crisis by growing stakeholders' awareness as a result of well-communicated information concerning potential crises and also ongoing issues. This increased awareness has resulted in the effectiveness of the set strategies for dealing with crises; it has also built trust and transparency between the institutions management and staff in any crises situation and has been facilitated by effective communication. An understanding is usually reached by having a clear communication of problems and solutions. The participants also acknowledged that The Feedback after the crisis is always processed and so far it shows the effectiveness of the strategies used by the crisis team.

How does internal communication play a role in effective crisis management within Taraba State University, Nigeria?

This study shows that Critical information is rapidly communicated to all members of the institutions internal public and stakeholders, Employees, students, academic staff, and management is all included in this. The participants noted that Both managements and staffs of the institution benefits from timely communication since it keeps them informed of the situation and enables them to act quickly when necessary and avoid miscommunication and the spread of rumors, It is also crucial to have clear strategies and processes in place during a crisis, the clear dissemination of these procedures to all stakeholders is ensured through effective internal communication which also helps to clear up rumors and direct people on how to react. Internal communication makes it possible for all departments and unions to collaborate effectively and stay on the same

page while the management and the crises team tackles the crises. The participants also noted that during crises, rumors and misinformation can spread quickly in the absence of reliable information therefore, internal communication serves as a trustworthy information source, ensuring that accurate information is transmitted and thwarting the spread of misleading information.

Effective communication is a lifeline to the survival of any organization or institution the participants all agreed internal communication that is effective and functioning well in an organization or institution can either make or mar an organization or institution. It fosters team work, improves the effectiveness of the employees and most importantly internal communication has saved this institution from crisis and an effective communication that is inclusive "by inclusive I mean open to feedback and act on it" has helped this team\committee manage and prevented any crisis situation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study discovered that internal communication plays a role in crisis Management in an organization. Clear Communication fosters relationship among staffs, management and stakeholders, with effective communication the goals and principles of the organization can be achieved and sustained. This research has also established that communication can be one of the most important determining factors of an organizations success, if an organization has a clear communication strategy crises can be managed or avoided. I am also able to establish that improper communication can lead to escalating crises, and have damaging reputation on an organization. There are different examples of crisis circumstance that can affect an organization ranging from public relations issues, and global pandemic among many others. An organization's reputation, operations, and stakeholder relationships can all be severely impacted by how it responds to any crises situation. Based on the findings of the study, the paper recommended that organizations should pay more attention to communication as it plays a major role in effective crises management.

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