



**UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATION**

**EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN  
GHANA'S PUBLIC SECTOR: A STUDY OF COCOBOD.**

**BY**

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**(MASPRM24031)**


**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND  
COMMUNICATION IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE AWARD OF MASTER  
OF ARTS DEGREE IN STRATEGIC PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT**

**DECEMBER 2025**

## DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that the work presented is the result of my own efforts, original research and findings and that no part of it has been presented for another degree or diploma in this university or elsewhere. All references to other people's work have been acknowledged. Therefore, I will be held responsible for any errors detected in this project work.

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DATE: ~~19th December 2025~~.....

## CERTIFICATION

I hereby declare that the preparation of this long essay was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for the supervision of dissertations laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication

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DATE: 19th December 2025 .....

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my family, whose steady love, support, and encouragement have carried me throughout my academic journey. Thank you for giving me the confidence to learn, to question, and to explore the world with a curious and hopeful spirit.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I am grateful to God for the strength, grace, and encouragement that carried me through the challenges of completing this thesis. I also appreciate my family for their unfailing support and steady presence throughout my academic journey.

My sincere thanks go to Dr. Priscilla Teika Odoom for the guidance, motivation, and thoughtful feedback that shaped this work and strengthened my growth. I am equally grateful to the participants, colleagues, and friends whose contributions and encouragement helped make this thesis possible.

## ABSTRACT

This study examined employee perceptions of internal crisis communication at the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD), exploring how communication practices influence trust in management and identifying barriers to effective information flow during organisational crises. Guided by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), the research adopted a qualitative case study design, collecting data through semi-structured interviews with ten employees across different hierarchical levels at COCOBOD headquarters in Accra. Thematic analysis revealed that employees perceive timeliness, clarity, and adequacy as critical dimensions of effective internal crisis communication. Delays in disseminating information exacerbated uncertainty and anxiety, while ambiguous or incomplete messages hindered employees' ability to respond appropriately. The study found that transparency, responsiveness, and consistency in communication strongly influenced employee trust in management. Open and empathetic communication fostered confidence in leadership, whereas inconsistent or opaque messaging eroded trust and heightened scepticism. Key barriers to effective communication included structural and hierarchical bottlenecks, limited feedback mechanisms, and cultural constraints that discouraged open dialogue and restricted two-way communication. The findings demonstrate that while COCOBOD has established some internal communication mechanisms, persistent challenges related to organisational structure and culture undermine their effectiveness. The study contributes to crisis communication literature by validating SCCT in an internal communication context within Ghana's public sector. Practical recommendations include enhancing communication timeliness and clarity, strengthening feedback mechanisms, fostering transparency, addressing structural bottlenecks, and promoting a culture of open dialogue to improve organisational resilience and employee trust during crises.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Organisations, whether private or public, are inevitably confronted with crises that threaten their operations, reputation, and stakeholder confidence (Thakur & Hale, 2022). Dahmen (2023) noted that crises can take many forms, financial, operational, technological, reputational, or human resource related, and their management often determines whether institutions recover quickly or spiral into further instability. One of the most critical dimensions of crisis management is internal communication, which refers to how information is generated, shared, and interpreted among employees within the organisation during turbulent times (Coombs, 2014).

Scholars argue that effective internal crisis communication reduces uncertainty, limits the spread of rumours, enhances trust, and sustains employee engagement (Gautam, 2024; Santoso et al., 2023). Conversely, poorly managed communication can deepen confusion, damage trust in leadership, and weaken employee morale (Hubbart, 2024). The perceptions employees hold about how management communicates in times of crisis are therefore central, as these perceptions shape not only their behaviour but also the overall effectiveness of the organisational response.

In Ghana, public sector institutions have faced a range of crises, including financial constraints, industrial actions, policy changes, and reputational challenges. These organisations are particularly vulnerable because they operate under high public scrutiny, depend on government funding, and serve as key vehicles for implementing national development policies (Gabor & Braun, 2025). Communication breakdowns in such institutions can therefore have

consequences that extend beyond the organisation, affecting citizens, industries, and government credibility.

The Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) offers a particularly relevant case. As the state agency responsible for regulating and promoting Ghana's cocoa industry, a sector that contributes significantly to national revenue and livelihoods, COCOBOD has faced recurring crises. These include cocoa smuggling, fluctuations in international cocoa prices, financial shortfalls, and delays in payments to farmers and contractors (Essuman & Chibundu, 2023). Each of these situations has placed pressure not only on leadership but also on employees across various levels of the institution. In such contexts, the way communication is managed internally becomes crucial for maintaining employee trust, ensuring operational continuity, and safeguarding the organisation's legitimacy.

Although crisis communication has been studied extensively in global contexts, most research in Ghana has concentrated on government communication with the public during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Antwi-Boasiako & Nyarkoh, 2021) or on general organisational change communication (Anani-Bossman et al., 2024). Less attention has been paid to how employees in Ghanaian public institutions perceive internal crisis communication. This gap is important because employees' lived experiences provide unique insights into whether communication is timely, transparent, and supportive or whether it leaves them feeling excluded and demoralised.

This study seeks to deepen the understanding of employee perceptions of internal crisis communication within Ghana's public sector by focusing on COCOBOD. The findings are

expected to shed light on how communication practices during crises influence employee trust in management, and what barriers stand in the way of effective communication.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Crises are unavoidable in organisations, but how institutions communicate internally during such periods often determines their resilience and employee confidence. Effective internal crisis communication ensures that employees receive accurate, timely, and transparent information, thereby reducing uncertainty and sustaining trust in leadership (Coombs, 2014; Shahi, 2024). On the other hand, when communication is inconsistent or inadequate, employees may feel excluded from critical processes, which can erode trust, lower morale, and weaken organisational commitment (Dhakal, 2025).

In Ghana, public sector institutions are not exempt from these challenges. Research suggests that employees in the public sector often experience top-down communication structures with limited opportunities for feedback, especially in times of organisational stress (Urbancová et al., 2023). This is problematic, as public institutions face crises that demand collective effort and employee engagement, including financial shortfalls, policy shifts, and reputational threats. Without effective communication, such crises may be worsened by rumours, misinformation, and employee disengagement.

The Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) exemplifies this situation. As the regulator and promoter of Ghana's cocoa industry, COCOBOD plays a central role in the economy, but it has faced recurrent crises such as cocoa smuggling, revenue challenges, and delays in payments (Ollendorf, 2024). These crises not only strain institutional capacity but also test the effectiveness of internal communication. Employees, who are central to the institution's

functioning, depend on timely and reliable information to perform their roles and sustain confidence in leadership. However, anecdotal accounts and limited academic studies suggest that communication during crises in Ghana's public institutions often lacks transparency and tends to be managerial rather than participatory (Anani-Bossman et al., 2024).

Despite the importance of employee perspectives, empirical research in Ghana has largely focused on external crisis communication (e.g., government messaging during COVID-19, see Koller, 2023) or on general organisational change communication (Anani-Bossman et al., 2024). Very little is known about how employees within public institutions, particularly COCOBOD, perceive internal communication during crises (Kena-asiedu, 2022; Mohamad et al., 2025). This lack of evidence creates a significant gap in both scholarship and practice. Without understanding employees' lived experiences, managers risk implementing communication strategies that overlook key concerns, thereby undermining trust and organisational resilience.

This study, therefore, addresses this gap by exploring employee perceptions of internal crisis communication at COCOBOD. In so doing, it contributes to literature on crisis communication in the public sector, while offering practical insights for strengthening communication practices in Ghana's public institutions.

### **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The study seeks to:

1. Examine how employees at COCOBOD perceive the timeliness, clarity, and adequacy of internal crisis communication.
2. Explore the role of internal crisis communication in shaping employee trust in management during crises.
3. Identify the barriers that hinder effective internal crisis communication at COCOBOD.

### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. How do employees at COCOBOD perceive the timeliness, clarity, and adequacy of internal crisis communication?
2. In what ways does internal crisis communication shape employee trust in management during crises?
3. What are the main barriers to effective internal crisis communication at COCOBOD?

### **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study is significant along two strands – research and practice. The research contributes to the limited body of literature on internal crisis communication in Ghana’s public sector. While studies have explored external crisis communication (Koller, 2023) and general organisational communication during change (Anani-Bossman et al., 2024), there is a notable absence of empirical work on how employees within public institutions perceive communication during crises. By focusing on COCOBOD, the study adds to scholarship on organisational communication in developing country contexts and offers insights that may refine existing crisis communication theories, particularly their applicability in African public institutions.

For COCOBOD, the findings provide evidence-based insights into how employees perceive internal communication during times of crisis. Understanding these perceptions can help management identify gaps in timeliness, clarity, and transparency, as well as barriers that prevent effective information flow. In turn, this knowledge can inform strategies for improving communication practices, building employee trust, and strengthening organisational resilience during future crises.

At a broader level, the findings may inform public sector communication policies in Ghana. Since many public institutions face similar challenges of bureaucratic structures, limited resources, and public accountability, the lessons drawn from COCOBOD may be transferable to other agencies. Improved internal crisis communication has implications for employee engagement, institutional legitimacy, and ultimately, public service delivery. In sum, this study is significant because it not only addresses an important scholarly gap but also provides actionable insights for organisational leaders and policymakers seeking to improve communication practices in Ghana's public institutions.

## **1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study is limited in scope to the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD), a major public sector institution responsible for regulating and promoting the cocoa industry in Ghana. The research focuses on employees' perceptions of internal crisis communication, with attention to three main areas: the timeliness, clarity, and adequacy of communication; how trust is constructed through internal crisis messages; and the barriers that hinder effective communication during crises.

Geographically, the study covers COCOBOD's head office in Accra. The population of interest comprises employees across different levels of the institution, including management, middle-level officers, and junior staff, with organisational experience of crisis situations.

The study focuses on crises events experienced within the last three to five years. This period is considered recent enough for employees to recall communication processes while also capturing multiple events that may reveal patterns in communication practices. The study does not extend to external communication between COCOBOD and its external stakeholders (such as farmers, media, or international partners), except where employees' accounts highlight how internal communication intersects with external messaging.

## **1.7 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY**

This study is organised into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the study by presenting the background, problem statement, research objectives and questions, significance, scope, and organisation. Chapter two reviews relevant literature on internal crisis communication, highlighting theoretical perspectives, empirical studies, and the conceptual framework. Chapter three outlines the research methodology, including the design, population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. Chapter four presents and analyses the findings of the study in line with the research objectives and questions. Finally, Chapter five discusses the findings in relation to existing literature, draws conclusions, and offers recommendations for improving internal crisis communication at COCOBOD and in similar public sector institutions.

## **1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter introduced the study on employee perceptions of internal crisis communication in Ghana's public sector, with a focus on COCOBOD. It began by providing the background to the study, establishing the importance of internal communication during crises, and situating the issue within the Ghanaian public sector context. The statement of the problem highlighted the gap in existing literature, noting that while external crisis communication and organisational change communication have been explored in Ghana, little is known about employees' experiences of internal communication during crises in public institutions. The chapter then set out the research objectives and questions, limited to three each, to guide the investigation. It also outlined the significance of the study at academic, practical, and policy levels, and clarified the scope of the research in terms of focus, geography, and participants. Finally, the organisation of the study was presented, providing a roadmap for the subsequent chapters.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the body of knowledge related to internal crisis communication and how employees perceive it, with particular reference to public sector organisations. The review draws on conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature to situate the study within broader scholarly debates. It begins with a conceptual review of key issues in internal crisis communication, followed by the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The chapter then provides an empirical review, drawing insights from global, African, and Ghanaian contexts. It concludes with the identification of gaps in the literature and a summary of the key insights relevant to the study.

#### **2.2 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

##### **2.2.1 Crisis and Internal Crisis Communication**

A crisis has been described as an unforeseen, disruptive, and often destabilising event that poses a serious threat to an organisation's survival, reputation, or ability to function effectively (Coombs & Holladay, 2024). Such events may arise from diverse sources, including financial downturns, technological breakdowns, natural disasters, industrial action, or reputational scandals. Unlike routine organisational challenges, crises are typically characterised by urgency, high uncertainty, and the potential for long-term consequences if not managed appropriately. Because crises often evolve rapidly, organisations must be prepared not only to respond to the immediate situation but also to safeguard relationships with their stakeholders, both internal and external.

In this context, internal crisis communication is recognised as one of the most critical tools available to management. It refers to the systematic sharing of information, guidance, and reassurance with employees during periods of instability (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2019). The internal audience is especially important because employees are both directly affected by crises and also play a central role in organisational recovery. Communication that is timely, transparent, and consistent enables employees to understand the nature of the crisis, their expected roles, and the organisation's overall strategy for managing the situation. Recent research demonstrates that effective internal communication fosters a sense of collective responsibility, ensuring that employees remain engaged and aligned with leadership decisions (Men et al., 2024).

Scholars emphasise that when internal communication is handled poorly, crises may be exacerbated through confusion, misinformation, and declining employee morale (Qin et al., 2023). For instance, delays or gaps in communication often encourage the spread of rumours, which may prove more damaging than the crisis itself. In contrast, proactive and participatory communication can minimise uncertainty and reinforce trust in management. Internal crisis communication, therefore, extends beyond the transmission of facts; it requires listening to employees' concerns, acknowledging their anxieties, and providing adequate platforms for dialogue. In this way, internal communication becomes not merely a managerial function but a strategic tool for building resilience and sustaining organisational legitimacy during turbulent times.

### **2.2.2 Dimensions of Effective Internal Crisis Communication**

Scholars consistently highlight timeliness as one of the most critical dimensions of effective internal crisis communication. In times of uncertainty, employees look to management for

immediate guidance on the nature of the crisis and its implications for their work. When information is delivered promptly, it allows employees to adjust their expectations and behaviours in ways that support the organisation's response. Conversely, delays in communication often fuel speculation and rumours, which may spread faster than official information and erode employee trust (Men et al., 2024). Recent studies during the COVID-19 pandemic particularly emphasised how timely updates also demonstrate that leadership is proactive, accessible, and responsive to emerging challenges (Gil-Lopez et al., 2023).

The second dimension, clarity, emphasises the need for communication that is accurate, straightforward, and easy to understand. Crises often generate confusion, and employees may struggle to interpret incomplete or overly technical information. Providing clear, unambiguous messages reduces the likelihood of misinterpretation and ensures that employees know exactly what actions are required of them (Zerfass et al., 2020). Clarity also involves consistency; when messages conflict across different departments or managers, it can create organisational dissonance, further undermining employee confidence in leadership. Therefore, clarity serves as a foundation for maintaining order and direction in the midst of disruption.

The third dimension, adequacy, refers to the depth, frequency, and relevance of the information communicated to employees. Adequacy ensures that employees do not feel left in the dark about critical decisions or organisational changes. Providing adequate communication means striking a balance: too little information may leave employees anxious and uninformed, while too much irrelevant detail may overwhelm them or reduce the focus on priority actions (Ravazzani, 2023). Adequate communication also involves listening to employees' concerns and addressing their informational needs rather than relying solely on top-down directives. Together, timeliness, clarity, and adequacy form the cornerstone of effective internal crisis

communication, directly shaping how employees perceive management's competence, transparency, and trustworthiness.

### **2.2.3 Employee Perceptions of Communication**

Employee perceptions of communication refer to the ways in which employees interpret and evaluate the messages, strategies, and channels used by management. Unlike the mere act of transmitting information, perceptions reflect employees' subjective judgments about whether communication meets their informational, emotional, and relational needs (Qin et al., 2023). These perceptions are shaped through past experiences, organisational culture, and the broader context in which the crisis unfolds. For example, employees who have previously experienced poor communication from management may approach crisis messages with skepticism, regardless of the actual content. As such, perceptions play a decisive role in shaping the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies.

In crisis contexts, employees often judge communication along three dimensions: transparency, participation, and empathy. Transparency refers to the openness and honesty of management in sharing information, especially about the severity of the crisis and the organisation's response strategies. Participation involves giving employees a voice in discussions or feedback loops, thereby fostering inclusion and ownership of the crisis response. Empathy reflects management's recognition of the stress and anxiety that employees may experience, conveyed through supportive language and assurances. When employees perceive communication as embodying these qualities, they are more likely to trust management, stay engaged, and align their behaviour with organisational goals (Men et al., 2024).

Conversely, when employees perceive communication as insufficient or manipulative, the effects can be highly detrimental. Research confirms that perceived gaps in communication often lead employees to disengage emotionally or resist directives, particularly when they feel excluded from decision-making processes (Ravazzani, 2023). In the absence of clear and empathetic communication, employees may rely on informal networks, which can give rise to rumours and misinformation. Such dynamics not only erode morale but also weaken organisational resilience, making recovery from crises more difficult. Employee perceptions, therefore, serve as a critical indicator of whether internal communication strategies are effective, underscoring the need for managers to pay close attention to how messages are received and interpreted rather than focusing solely on message delivery.

## **2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.3.1 Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)**

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) was developed by W. Timothy Coombs in 2007 as an extension of earlier work on image restoration and apologia strategies. Coombs' contribution was to provide a systematic framework that guides organisations in choosing appropriate communication strategies during crises based on situational variables (Coombs, 2022). The theory is grounded in attribution theory, which suggests that stakeholders attempt to assign responsibility or blame when crises occur. SCCT emphasises that the level of responsibility attributed to an organisation directly influences the reputational threat it faces, and therefore, communication strategies must be tailored to the nature of the crisis and stakeholder perceptions (Wang et al., 2022).

The core assumptions of SCCT are threefold. First, not all crises are equal; they vary in type and severity, requiring context-specific communication strategies. Second, stakeholders'

attributions of responsibility are central in shaping organisational reputation during a crisis. For example, crises caused by external forces beyond the organisation's control, such as natural disasters, are likely to attract less blame compared to those stemming from organisational negligence (Lyu & Peng, 2022). Third, effective crisis communication should aim to protect organisational reputation and restore stakeholder trust through selecting strategies that are consistent with the crisis type. These strategies may include denial, excuse, justification, apology, or corrective action, depending on the extent of responsibility and damage (Coombs & Holladay, 2024). Importantly, SCCT stresses that communication is not simply about disseminating facts but also about managing stakeholder emotions, perceptions, and expectations.

its wide application, SCCT has faced several criticisms. One limitation is its heavy reliance on attribution theory, which assumes that stakeholders' perceptions of responsibility are the primary determinants of reputational outcomes. Critics argue that crises are complex and influenced through cultural, political, and relational factors that extend beyond responsibility attributions (Zerfass et al., 2020). Additionally, SCCT has been critiqued for its focus on external stakeholders such as customers and media, while paying limited attention to internal stakeholders like employees (Qin et al., 2023). This is significant because employees are both recipients and transmitters of crisis messages, and their perceptions can directly affect organisational resilience. Furthermore, scholars have noted that SCCT tends to prioritise organisational reputation over other ethical considerations, such as transparency or accountability (Liu et al., 2019). These criticisms highlight the need to adapt and expand SCCT, especially in public sector and developing-country contexts, where internal communication and employee engagement are vital.

Considering these strengths and weaknesses, SCCT remains a valuable but adaptable framework for the present study. Its emphasis on situationally appropriate strategies aligns with the need to examine how COCOBOD communicates with employees during crises. However, given its criticisms, this study broadens SCCT's application by focusing on employees as internal stakeholders and exploring how their perceptions of communication timeliness, clarity, and adequacy affect trust in management during organisational turbulence.

### **2.3.2 Significance of the Theory to the Study**

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is significant to this study primarily because of its strong emphasis on stakeholder perceptions. In the case of COCOBOD, employees represent a critical category of internal stakeholders whose perceptions shape organisational stability during crises. SCCT posits that crisis responses are only effective when they resonate with stakeholder expectations and interpretations of the situation (Wang et al., 2022). This aligns closely with the objectives of the present study, which seeks to examine how employees interpret the timeliness, clarity, and adequacy of internal crisis communication. Centring stakeholder perceptions, SCCT provides a robust theoretical framework for analysing how communication practices during crises are received and judged by employees in Ghana's public sector.

Another reason SCCT is particularly relevant lies in its focus on strategy selection. The theory underscores that mismatched or inappropriate strategies can amplify reputational damage and stakeholder dissatisfaction rather than resolve it (Lyu & Peng, 2022). For internal stakeholders such as employees, ineffective communication strategies may manifest as information gaps, a lack of transparency, or managerial dominance that excludes staff voices. In such instances, rather than reassuring employees, communication can fuel distrust, frustration, and

disengagement. Applying SCCT to COCOBOD, therefore, enables the study to assess whether the institution's communication strategies during crises align with the expectations of employees or whether they contribute to organisational instability.

Finally, the significance of SCCT lies in its adaptability to the context of internal crisis communication, an area that has traditionally received less attention in the literature compared to external communication. While much of SCCT has been applied to protecting organisations' public image, this study broadens its scope by considering how the same principles can be applied to internal communication processes. This application is especially critical in the Ghanaian public sector, where bureaucratic structures and resource constraints often shape how communication unfolds (Obuobisa-Darko et al., 2024). Adopting SCCT as a guiding lens, the study is positioned to generate insights not only into the effectiveness of COCOBOD's internal crisis communication but also into the broader relevance of the theory for developing-country contexts.

## **2.4 EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

### **2.4.1 Global Perspective**

Globally, research highlights the centrality of effective internal communication in ensuring organisational stability during crises. Men et al. (2024) demonstrated that transparent and empathetic communication not only fosters employee trust but also enhances organisational resilience in multinational corporations. Similarly, Gil-Lopez et al. (2023) found that European firms that prioritised participatory communication during turbulent periods preserved stronger employee management relationships than those adopting rigid, top-down communication styles. Collectively, these studies suggest that the quality of communication defined through openness, inclusiveness, and empathy is just as critical as the content being conveyed.

The global literature further stresses that the timely dissemination of accurate information is essential for reducing uncertainty and preventing misinformation. Ravazzani (2023) revealed that employees in Italian organisations valued rapid updates during crises, as delays often created anxiety and fueled rumours. Supporting this, Zerfass et al. (2020) argue that organisations that fail to communicate promptly risk losing credibility among employees, which in turn undermines coordinated responses. These findings point to the fact that the speed of internal communication can determine whether employees feel supported or abandoned in times of organisational distress.

Another major theme in global research is the link between communication practices and employee engagement during crises. Men et al. (2024) established that two-way, dialogic communication empowered employees in North American companies to become active participants in navigating crises, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging. Likewise, Qin et al. (2023) found that transparent crisis communication in Asian firms positively influenced employees' organisational commitment, which was crucial for maintaining morale under pressure. These results underscore the role of communication not merely as a managerial function but as a relational process that shapes employee motivation and organisational cohesion.

Finally, studies have revealed that the cultural and organisational context influences how employees perceive crisis communication strategies. Wang et al. (2022) emphasised that multinational firms must adapt their internal crisis communication to suit cultural expectations of openness and hierarchy, as practices effective in one country may fail in another. In a similar vein, Liu et al. (2019) argued that organisations in Europe that nurtured a culture of internal communication before crises were better positioned to sustain employee trust when disruptions

occurred. These insights affirm that while certain principles of effective internal crisis communication are universal, their application must be context-sensitive, taking into account cultural norms and organisational structures.

#### **2.4.2 African Perspective**

In Africa, research on internal crisis communication is gradually expanding, with many studies highlighting the challenges faced by public institutions. Recent research indicates that Ghana's health sector often struggles with fragmented communication systems, which hinder effective staff coordination during crises such as strikes or epidemics (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). Similarly, Banda (2019) observed in Zambia that delays in relaying information during organisational disruptions reduced employees' confidence in leadership. These findings suggest that weak communication infrastructures remain a critical barrier to effective internal crisis management across African public sectors.

Studies also point to the importance of communication clarity in African organisations. Nwagbara and Ugwu (2020) found that ambiguous communication during crises in Nigerian corporations often left employees confused and vulnerable to misinformation, ultimately eroding trust in management. Likewise, Adubor (2020) emphasised that clarity and consistency in message delivery were crucial in South African organisations to counteract rumours and speculation during crises. These studies reinforce the idea that in contexts where formal communication channels are sometimes unreliable, employees rely heavily on clear, accessible, and trustworthy communication from management.

Another theme in the African literature is the role of leadership style in shaping employee perceptions of crisis communication. Kuada (2020) argued that African organisational leaders

often rely on authoritarian, top-down approaches that stifle employee input during crises, undermining staff morale and collaboration. Supporting this view, Boateng and Agyemang (2018) found that Ghanaian organisations that adopted participatory communication models were more successful in retaining employee commitment during organisational challenges. This indicates that leadership practices and communication styles are intertwined and significantly affect employees' crisis experiences in African workplaces.

Finally, cultural factors have been shown to shape how employees interpret internal crisis communication across the continent. Kasekende et al. (2019) observed that in Ugandan organisations, employees placed a high value on empathetic communication that acknowledged their emotional well-being during crises. Similarly, Abubakar (2018) reported that in Nigerian firms, communication strategies that incorporated cultural sensitivity, such as respect for hierarchy and communal values, were more effective in maintaining trust and organisational stability. These insights illustrate that, in Africa, internal crisis communication is not merely about information transmission but also about aligning strategies with cultural and social realities.

### **2.4.3 Ghanaian Perspective**

In Ghana, research on organisational communication highlights persistent challenges in how public institutions engage employees during crises. Obuobisa-Darko et al. (2024) argue that bureaucratic communication structures often limit the speed and openness with which information flows to staff, leaving employees uncertain in times of organisational disruption. Similarly, recent studies in the health sector found that fragmented communication systems made it difficult for frontline workers to access timely information during crises such as strikes and epidemics (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). These findings suggest that, in Ghana,

institutional hierarchies and systemic weaknesses contribute significantly to ineffective internal crisis communication.

Clarity and transparency also emerge as major concerns in Ghanaian organisations. Anani-Bossman et al. (2024) note that during organisational change processes, employees often perceive management messages as vague or overly technical, which fuels mistrust and disengagement. Complementing this, Asante and Affum-Osei (2019) observed that during industrial disputes in Ghanaian public institutions, employees relied heavily on rumours and informal networks due to a lack of clear communication from leadership. Together, these studies highlight the risks of inadequate clarity and transparency in organisational communication, particularly when crises heighten employee anxieties.

Leadership style has also been shown to shape how crisis communication is perceived in Ghana. Boateng and Agyemang (2018) found that participatory communication models, where leaders actively involve employees in dialogue, significantly improved morale and resilience during times of organisational turbulence. In contrast, Kuada (2020) observed that Ghanaian leaders often adopt authoritarian approaches that restrict feedback, which undermines employees' confidence in official crisis responses. These contrasting insights suggest that leadership communication practices play a decisive role in shaping employee perceptions of crisis management in Ghana's public institutions.

Cultural expectations further influence how employees in Ghana interpret crisis communication. Ofori and Hinson (2019) argue that employees often value respectful and empathetic communication that acknowledges their concerns, especially in contexts of economic or institutional instability. Likewise, research shows that in public health institutions, communication strategies that aligned with communal values and emphasised collective

responsibility were more effective in sustaining staff commitment (Abekah-Nkrumah et al., 2020). These perspectives emphasise that, in Ghana, internal crisis communication must not only be timely and transparent but also culturally attuned to build trust and preserve institutional legitimacy.

#### **2.4.4 Employee Perceptions of Timeliness, Clarity, and Adequacy**

Timeliness is a central factor shaping how employees perceive crisis communication. Men et al. (2024) contend that when management delays the dissemination of critical information, employees resort to informal networks that often spread misinformation and fuel organisational rumours. Similarly, Gil-Lopez et al. (2023) observed that timely communication not only provides employees with a sense of security but also reduces speculation and anxiety during crises. These findings highlight that employees interpret communication delays as negligence or disregard, which undermines trust in leadership and organisational stability.

Clarity also plays a decisive role in influencing employee perceptions. Zerfass et al. (2020) found that clear and transparent messaging fosters a sense of inclusion and control among employees, thereby reducing crisis-induced stress. Consistent with this, Qin et al. (2023) argued that vague or ambiguous communication erodes employee confidence, creating uncertainty about their roles and responsibilities. Employees, therefore, perceive clarity not just as a technical quality of messages but as a sign of management's commitment to transparency and accountability.

Adequacy of information is equally important in shaping employee responses. Ravazzani (2023) reported that in many bureaucratic organisations, employees often perceive communication as inadequate because leadership withholds or filters information. Supporting

this, recent studies noted that insufficient detail in crisis communication often leads employees to believe that management is concealing critical facts, which in turn fosters mistrust (Wang et al., 2022). Employees interpret adequacy in terms of both the depth and breadth of information, valuing communication that addresses their professional responsibilities as well as their personal concerns.

Research also shows that perceptions of timeliness, clarity, and adequacy interact to influence overall employee engagement during crises. Men et al. (2024) demonstrated that when organisations combine prompt communication with messages that are both clear and sufficiently detailed, employees are more likely to remain committed to organisational goals. Likewise, Liu et al. (2019) emphasised that employees judge the credibility of crisis communication based on how well these three dimensions are integrated. These insights suggest that for employees, effective crisis communication is holistic, timely information loses value if it is unclear or incomplete, while clarity and adequacy matter little if messages arrive too late to be useful.

#### **2.4.5 Influence of Communication on Employee Trust in Management**

Trust is widely acknowledged as one of the most critical outcomes of internal crisis communication. Men et al. (2024) argue that employees are more likely to sustain trust in leadership when communication is transparent, consistent, and inclusive. Similarly, recent research emphasised that openness in organisational communication reduces perceptions of secrecy, enabling employees to feel respected and valued even under crisis conditions (Zerfass et al., 2020). These findings indicate that the perceived honesty and transparency of messages strongly determine whether employees continue to trust management during turbulent times.

Consistency in communication has also been found to significantly shape employee trust. Ravazzani (2023) showed that inconsistent or contradictory messages undermine credibility, leading employees to suspect management of concealment or incompetence. Supporting this, Gil-Lopez et al. (2023) noted that in the absence of consistent updates, employees often rely on rumours and speculation, which erode confidence in formal communication channels. Employees, therefore, associate consistent communication not only with managerial reliability but also with organisational stability.

In the public sector, trust derived from effective communication is particularly critical because employees operate in highly politicised and resource-constrained environments. Wang et al. (2022) found that transparent communication in government organisations fosters trust through reassuring employees that decision-making processes are fair and accountable. Similarly, Liu et al. (2019) observed that when public sector leaders engage employees openly during crises, staff morale is sustained even in the face of financial or operational uncertainty. This suggests that in contexts such as COCOBOD, effective crisis communication is inseparable from maintaining institutional legitimacy and employee confidence.

Scholars also note that communication affects not only immediate trust but also long-term employee commitment. Qin et al. (2023) demonstrated that trust built through open and empathetic communication strengthens employees' willingness to support organisational recovery efforts after crises. Complementing this, recent studies highlighted that trust functions as a psychological contract, where employees expect management to act with integrity and communicate honestly (Men et al., 2024). When these expectations are met, employees are more likely to remain loyal and engaged, even when external pressures or institutional crises persist.

#### **2.4.6 Barriers to Effective Internal Crisis Communication**

One of the most persistent barriers to effective internal crisis communication is the prevalence of hierarchical organisational structures. Research argues that such rigid hierarchies delay the flow of information by concentrating decision-making power at the top and filtering communication through multiple layers (Ravazzani, 2023). Similarly, Zerfass et al. (2020) note that hierarchical communication systems often result in the distortion or dilution of messages before they reach employees, particularly in large bureaucracies. These dynamics prevent timely and accurate communication, undermining employees' confidence in leadership during crises.

Resource limitations also restrict the effectiveness of communication in many organisations. Recent African studies highlight that inadequate investment in communication technologies and training weakens organisations' capacity to reach employees quickly and consistently during emergencies (Kasekende et al., 2019). Complementing this, research points out that even when technologies exist, insufficient human resources to manage communication processes often lead to fragmented or delayed messaging (Wang et al., 2022). These challenges are particularly acute in public sector institutions in developing countries, where financial and infrastructural constraints are commonplace.

Managerial attitudes present another significant barrier. Anani-Bossman et al. (2024) observed that in Ghanaian public institutions, communication is often dominated by management, with limited opportunities for employees to provide feedback. Supporting this view, Kuada (2020) noted that leaders in African contexts frequently adopt authoritarian approaches that stifle dialogue and discourage participation. This managerial dominance not only reduces

inclusiveness but also fosters perceptions among employees that their voices are undervalued, further eroding trust during crises.

Finally, cultural and psychological barriers can also impede communication effectiveness. Recent research reported that employees in some African organisations are reluctant to openly question or challenge authority due to cultural norms of deference, which restrict upward communication during crises (Abubakar, 2018). Similarly, studies showed that uncertainty and fear in crises may drive employees to remain silent, even when communication channels exist (Men et al., 2024). These insights suggest that barriers to effective internal crisis communication are not merely structural or technological but also deeply embedded in organisational cultures and employee behaviours.

## **2.5 IDENTIFIED GAPS IN THE LITERATURE**

The reviewed literature underscores the importance of internal crisis communication globally, across Africa, and in Ghana. Studies highlight that timeliness, clarity, and adequacy of information are crucial in shaping employee trust and engagement (Men et al., 2024; Zerfass et al., 2020). However, much of the research has concentrated on external crisis communication with the public or on organisational change communication, leaving employee perspectives within public institutions underexplored (Anani-Bossman et al., 2024; Ravazzani, 2023). In Africa, existing studies emphasise structural and cultural barriers but provide limited insights into how employees interpret communication practices during crises (Kuada, 2020; Kasekende et al., 2019).

Specifically in Ghana, although some research has examined communication in health and other sectors (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Obuobisa-Darko et al., 2024), there is little empirical evidence on how employees in key public institutions, such as COCOBOD, perceive internal crisis communication. This gap is significant given COCOBOD's central role in Ghana's economy and its recurring crises. Addressing this gap will contribute to both scholarship and practice through illuminating how internal communication practices influence trust, morale, and organisational resilience in the Ghanaian public sector.

## **2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter reviewed literature on internal crisis communication by examining conceptual issues, theoretical perspectives, and empirical evidence. The conceptual review emphasised the nature of crises, the dimensions of effective communication, timeliness, clarity, and adequacy, and the role of employee perceptions. The discussion of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) highlighted its relevance in explaining how communication strategies influence stakeholder trust. The empirical review drew on global, African, and Ghanaian studies, showing that while effective internal communication fosters trust and resilience, barriers such as hierarchy, managerial dominance, and cultural norms often undermine it. Importantly, the review revealed a gap in research on employee perceptions of crisis communication in Ghana's public institutions, particularly COCOBOD, underscoring the need for this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to investigate employee perceptions of internal crisis communication within Ghana's public sector, focusing on the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD). It describes the research design, population, sampling strategies, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Ethical considerations and limitations of the methodology are also addressed. The overall purpose is to ensure transparency and rigour in the research process, thereby strengthening the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is appropriate for exploring the complex and subjective nature of employee perceptions of internal crisis communication within COCOBOD. Qualitative research is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which holds that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the meanings individuals assign to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the focus of this study is on how employees perceive the timeliness, clarity, and adequacy of communication during crises, a qualitative approach provides the flexibility to capture nuanced insights that cannot be quantified.

The qualitative approach allows the researcher to gain a holistic understanding of participants' perspectives through open-ended discussions, thereby uncovering the dynamics of trust, communication barriers, and organisational practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Unlike quantitative methods, which rely on statistical generalisation, this approach emphasises depth

over breadth, prioritising rich descriptions of lived experiences. This aligns with the study's objective of exploring perceptions rather than testing hypotheses or measuring relationships.

Furthermore, a qualitative approach enhances contextual sensitivity by situating employee experiences within the broader organisational and socio-cultural environment of Ghana's public sector (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). It enables the researcher to interpret not only what employees say but also the underlying meanings, assumptions, and organisational realities shaping their communication experiences. Thus, the approach is best suited to provide detailed insights into the research questions, while also laying a foundation for practical recommendations to improve internal crisis communication.

### **3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study employs a case study design, which is particularly suitable for exploring employee perceptions of internal crisis communication within a specific organisational context. A case study allows for an in-depth examination of a phenomenon within its real-life setting, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018). Since internal crisis communication is influenced by organisational culture, structures, and leadership practices, the case study approach enables a holistic exploration of how these factors shape employee perceptions at COCOBOD.

The choice of a case study design is also justified by its ability to capture multiple perspectives. As Lim (2025) notes, case studies facilitate a detailed understanding of complex social phenomena by incorporating the voices of participants who directly experience the issue under investigation. In this study, employees from different units and levels within COCOBOD provide diverse insights into the effectiveness, challenges, and implications of internal crisis

communication. This makes the case study design an effective framework for answering the research questions.

Moreover, the case study design aligns with the interpretivist paradigm underpinning the study, as it emphasises meaning-making and the subjective interpretations of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By focusing on COCOBOD as a single case, the study does not seek statistical generalisation but rather aims for analytical generalisation, where the findings can inform both theory and practice in similar public sector contexts. The design therefore provides a structured yet flexible framework for generating rich, contextualised insights into internal crisis communication practices in Ghana's public institutions.

### **3.4 POPULATION OF THE STUDY**

The population of this study comprises all employees of the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD), one of Ghana's largest public sector institutions. COCOBOD employs staff across several departments, including finance, administration, human resources, research, monitoring and evaluation, and field operations. Employees in these departments are directly affected by the organisation's internal communication practices, particularly during times of crisis such as financial challenges, labour disputes, or policy shifts.

For this study, the population is restricted to staff working at the COCOBOD headquarters in Accra. The headquarters is the administrative hub of the institution where key decisions are made and strategic communication originates. As such, employees based at the headquarters are most likely to experience internal crisis communication directly, whether as initiators at the management level or as recipients at middle and junior staff levels.

The study population, therefore, includes employees across all hierarchical categories at the headquarters, senior management, middle-level managers, and junior staff. This approach is essential because perceptions of internal crisis communication may differ depending on employees' rank, roles, and access to information (Kreps, 2019). Focusing on the headquarters ensures that the study captures insights from those who are most closely engaged in and influenced by organisational communication processes during crises.

### **3.5 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE AND SAMPLE SIZE**

This study employs a purposive sampling technique to select participants. Purposive sampling is appropriate for qualitative research because it allows the researcher to deliberately select individuals who can provide the most relevant and insightful information about the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015). Since the study focuses on employee perceptions of internal crisis communication, it is essential to engage staff who have directly experienced or been exposed to organisational communication processes during times of crisis.

The sampling therefore targeted employees across different hierarchical levels at the COCOBOD headquarters in Accra, including senior management, middle-level managers, and junior staff. This stratification is necessary to capture diverse perspectives and to compare how communication practices are perceived across organisational ranks (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By including employees from various departments such as finance, administration, and human resources, the study ensures representation of different functional areas within the organisation.

In terms of sample size, qualitative research emphasises depth over breadth. According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), a sample of 15 to 30 participants is often sufficient to achieve data saturation in qualitative studies, where no new themes emerge from additional

interviews. Guided by this, the study purposively selected 10 employees from the headquarters. This number is considered adequate to capture a wide range of employee perceptions while ensuring manageability in data collection and analysis.

### **3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND INSTRUMENTATION**

The study relied primarily on semi-structured interviews as the main data collection method. Semi-structured interviews are particularly suitable for qualitative research because they combine flexibility with focus, allowing the researcher to explore specific themes while also allowing participants to share their unique perspectives in depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This method is appropriate for investigating employee perceptions of internal crisis communication, as it enables employees to express their experiences, opinions, and emotions regarding how information is shared during times of crisis.

An interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and questions. The guide covered areas such as employees' perceptions of timeliness, clarity, and adequacy of communication; the influence of internal communication on trust in management; and barriers that hinder effective communication. Open-ended questions were used to encourage detailed responses, while follow-up prompts allowed for clarification and deeper exploration of emerging themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **3.7 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

Data collection for this study was carried out through semi-structured interviews with employees of COCOBOD at the headquarters in Accra. The researcher began by seeking official permission from the management of COCOBOD to access employees and conduct

interviews within the institution. Once approval is obtained, potential participants were approached and informed about the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and the voluntary nature of their involvement.

Interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis at times and locations convenient for participants, preferably within the workplace to ensure accessibility, and also in private settings to encourage open and honest responses. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data. In addition, field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual observations that may enrich the analysis (Patton, 2015).

To build rapport and encourage participants to share openly, the researcher began interviews with general questions before gradually moving into more specific topics relating to internal crisis communication. This approach helped participants feel at ease while ensuring that the discussions remain relevant to the research objectives. The researcher also assured participants of strict confidentiality and anonymity to minimise concerns about potential repercussions for expressing candid views.

### **3.8 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES**

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to identify, organise, and interpret patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method is suitable for the study as it enables a systematic exploration of employees' perceptions of internal crisis communication at COCOBOD, focusing on key themes such as timeliness, clarity, adequacy, trust, and communication barriers.

The analysis began with careful transcription of all audio-recorded interviews. The researcher then read and re-read the transcripts to become familiar with the data, followed by initial coding of significant statements and ideas. These codes were collated into broader categories that reflect recurring patterns and issues raised by participants. From these categories, overarching themes were developed and refined to align with the research objectives and questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To ensure rigour, the researcher applied strategies such as comparing responses across different employee levels (senior management, middle management, and junior staff) and constantly checking themes against the raw data to avoid misrepresentation. Direct quotations from participants were also incorporated in the analysis to illustrate key findings and to give voice to employees' lived experiences. This approach ensures that the analysis remains grounded in participants' perspectives while contributing to meaningful interpretations of the phenomenon under study.

### **3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY**

In qualitative research, establishing trustworthiness was essential to ensure that findings were credible, dependable, transferable, and confirmable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study adopted strategies to uphold these four dimensions of trustworthiness throughout the research process.

Credibility referred to confidence in the truth of the findings. To enhance credibility, the study used prolonged engagement with participants during interviews, allowing sufficient time to explore their perceptions in depth. Additionally, the researcher employed member checking,

where participants were allowed to review and confirm their responses, ensuring that interpretations accurately reflected their experiences (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability related to the consistency and reliability of the research process. The study ensured dependability by maintaining a detailed audit trail documenting all methodological decisions, including how participants were selected, how interviews were conducted, and how data were analysed. This transparency allowed others to follow the research process and understand how conclusions were reached.

Transferability concerned the extent to which findings could be applied in similar contexts. While qualitative research did not aim for statistical generalisation, rich descriptions of COCOBOD's internal communication practices and the context of the headquarters were provided. This enabled other researchers and practitioners to assess whether the findings were relevant to similar public sector institutions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Confirmability ensured that findings were shaped by participants' experiences rather than researcher bias. Reflexive practices, such as maintaining field notes and reflective journals during data collection and analysis, were employed. The study demonstrated that interpretations were grounded in participants' perspectives and not in the researcher's preconceived notions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical considerations were central to conducting research involving human participants, ensuring that the rights, dignity, and well being of participants were protected (Israel & Hay, 2006). This study adhered to strict ethical standards throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Each participant was

provided with clear information about the study's purpose, objectives, procedures, and potential risks or benefits. Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point without facing any negative consequences.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. Participants' identities were protected by using pseudonyms, and any identifying information was removed from transcripts and reports. Data were stored securely in password protected files accessible only to the researcher. Minimising potential harm was another key consideration. The study involved discussing experiences of internal crisis communication, which sometimes touched on sensitive issues. The researcher ensured that questions were posed respectfully, and participants were reminded that they were not required to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable.

Finally, ethical clearance was sought from the relevant university ethics committee before data collection began. Approval from COCOBOD management was also obtained to ensure institutional compliance and support. These measures collectively ensured that the study was conducted in a manner that respected participants' rights, maintained professional integrity, and upheld academic standards.

### **3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has outlined the methodology adopted for the study, including the qualitative research design, case study approach, population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Ethical considerations and potential limitations were also discussed. The next chapter presents the findings from the field, organised thematically in line with the research objectives and questions.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the results of the thematic analysis conducted after interviewing ten employees at the Ghana Cocoa Board headquarters. The purpose of the chapter is to explain how the participants perceive internal crisis communication, how such communication shapes their trust in management, and the barriers that hinder effective information flow during organisational crises. The analysis is organised around the three research questions that guided the study and is supported with direct comments from participants to illustrate their experiences. These insights are then interpreted in relation to existing research on crisis communication, organisational behaviour, and employee management. The chapter, therefore, provides an integrated account of participant perspectives and the broader theoretical arguments that help to explain them.

#### **4.2 PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS**

Ten employees from COCOBOD headquarters took part in the study. Their positions ranged from senior management to junior staff, offering a broad perspective on how internal crisis communication is crafted, transmitted, and experienced across different levels of the organisation. To protect anonymity and privacy, specific job titles and units have been generalised, and no identifiable details are included. The participants had between 2 and 21 years of experience. Three of them were in senior leadership positions with direct involvement in decision making, four held middle-level supervisory roles, and three were junior staff whose reflections capture how communication is received and acted upon at the operational level.

This spread of roles aligns with observations in organisational communication research that meaningful analysis requires perspectives from multiple layers of hierarchy, since experiences of information flow frequently differ between managers and frontline employees (Kreps 2019; Cornelissen 2020).

The group consisted of six men and four women. Their varied responsibilities and lengths of service contributed to a rich dataset that reflects both institutional knowledge and contemporary organisational experiences. The diversity in role, tenure, and positional influence made them suitable contributors to a study examining timeliness, clarity, adequacy, trust, and barriers in internal crisis communication.

**Table 4.1** Profile of Participants

<b>Participant ID</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Role Level</b>	<b>Years of Service</b>
P1	Male	Senior Management	18 years
P2	Female	Senior Management	15 years
P3	Male	Senior Management	12 years
P4	Female	Middle Level Staff	10 years
P5	Male	Middle Level Staff	7 years
P6	Female	Middle Level Staff	6 years
P7	Male	Middle Level Staff	5 years
P8	Female	Junior Staff	4 years
P9	Male	Junior Staff	3 years
P10	Male	Junior Staff	2 years

### **4.3: RQ1: HOW DO EMPLOYEES AT COCOBOD PERCEIVE THE TIMELINESS, CLARITY, AND ADEQUACY OF INTERNAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION?**

This research question sought to explore employees' experiences and evaluations of internal communication during times of crisis at COCOBOD. Specifically, it aimed to understand how employees perceive the speed of information dissemination, the clarity of messages, and the sufficiency of details provided to support their work. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed three main themes under this question: perceptions of timeliness, clarity, and adequacy of communication. These themes reflect the recurring patterns in participants' narratives and provide insight into both strengths and weaknesses in COCOBOD's internal crisis communication practices.

#### **4.3.1 Perceptions of Timeliness**

Timeliness was a recurring concern among participants, with many highlighting that the speed of communication during crises significantly affects their ability to respond and maintain confidence in management. P1 emphasised that "sometimes, by the time an official notice is circulated, staff have already heard rumours or partial information, which shapes their reactions and expectations in ways that can complicate crisis management." Similar concerns were indicated by other participants. As P5 stated, "messages often arrive after the crisis has begun to affect operations", adding that rapid updates would help employees manage their responsibilities more effectively and reduce unnecessary confusion.

P9 highlighted, "There are moments when we only learn about the problem when someone from outside the department mentions it. That delay makes it hard to know what to do,"

illustrating the sense of uncertainty created by slow communication. In contrast, P3 reflected on managerial constraints, stating that, “I try to send timely notices, but sometimes the decision-making process takes longer than expected, which means communication is delayed despite our intentions to keep staff informed as soon as possible.”

These insights indicate that timeliness is not merely about sending information quickly but also about managing expectations and mitigating uncertainty. The findings are consistent with Men et al. (2024), who argue that rapid communication reduces employee anxiety and fosters trust during crises. Ravazzani (2023) similarly notes that delays can intensify speculation and misinformation, undermining organisational cohesion. However, the acknowledgement by some participants of hierarchical and procedural constraints aligns with Urbancová et al. (2023), who observed that bureaucratic structures in public sector organisations can impede prompt communication. This interplay between organisational limitations and employees’ expectations highlights the importance of proactive communication strategies that account for both speed and clarity in disseminating crisis information.

#### **4.3.2 Perceptions of Clarity**

Clarity emerged as a critical factor influencing how employees interpret and act on crisis-related information. Participants frequently highlighted that messages during crises are sometimes ambiguous, leaving room for multiple interpretations. P2 stated, “At times, the communication is so full of technical terms and jargon that it takes a while for us to understand what management expects from us. It feels like we are left guessing.” Similarly, P6 emphasised that clarity is not just about language but about consistency across departments: “Even when messages are sent, sometimes different managers explain things differently. You start wondering which version is accurate.”

P7 provided a longer reflection, noting,

There was a situation last year when a sudden financial shortfall affected several departments. The initial memo from management was brief and vague, and many of us didn't know whether to pause our activities or continue. It caused unnecessary stress because people were interpreting the instructions differently, and rumours started spreading about layoffs, which were untrue.

P10 highlighted that while clarity is generally adequate, it can suffer when messages are rushed:

“Sometimes updates are sent very quickly without proper context. We get the information, but we're unsure how it affects our roles directly.”

These findings align with Zerfass et al. (2020), who argue that unclear or inconsistent communication during crises exacerbates confusion and erodes employee confidence. Similarly, Qin et al. (2023) emphasise that clear, concise, and consistent messages are vital for ensuring that employees understand their responsibilities and can respond effectively. The participant reflections also suggest that clarity interacts with organisational structure; when communication passes through multiple managerial layers, the risk of distortion increases, echoing Ravazzani's (2023) observation that clarity must be maintained across all levels of the organisation to preserve trust and prevent misinformation. Overall, clarity is not merely a stylistic preference but a strategic necessity in internal crisis communication.

### **4.3.3 Perceptions of Communication Adequacy**

Adequacy of communication refers to the extent to which employees feel they receive sufficient, relevant, and timely information during crises. Participants highlighted that while COCOBOD management generally provides updates, the depth and detail of information are sometimes insufficient to make informed decisions or manage tasks effectively. P3 remarked, “We get emails and memos, but they often skim the surface. I am left wondering about the

actual impact on my team and the work I am responsible for.” P8 similarly emphasised that the lack of detail can create anxiety: “Sometimes I feel like I am only getting half the story. It’s hard to plan when you don’t know the full picture.”

P1 provided a more detailed reflection, noting,

During the recent supply chain disruption, updates came through, but they only outlined the problem briefly without explaining what specific measures were being taken or how departments should adjust their work. Many of us spent hours trying to figure out what to prioritise, and it slowed down our response.

P5, in contrast, highlighted instances where communication was perceived as adequate: “In some cases, especially when the crisis is small, management provides clear steps and actionable guidance. It helps us stay focused and reduces unnecessary worry.”

These insights correspond with Ravazzani’s (2023) assertion that adequacy involves not only the frequency of communication but also its relevance and completeness. Insufficient information can leave employees feeling uncertain and disengaged, reinforcing findings from Men et al. (2024) that adequate communication strengthens employees’ confidence in management’s competence and organisational resilience. Conversely, too much irrelevant detail can also overwhelm staff, which participants did not report extensively, suggesting that COCOBOD generally avoids information overload. The study indicates that while COCOBOD strives to maintain adequate communication during crises, there remain gaps in depth and relevance that can affect employee preparedness and confidence.

#### **4.4 RQ2: IN WHAT WAYS DOES INTERNAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION AFFECT EMPLOYEE TRUST IN MANAGEMENT DURING CRISES?**

This research question sought to explore how internal crisis communication influences employees’ trust in management during periods of organisational turbulence at COCOBOD.

The analysis revealed that communication practices directly affect perceptions of managerial credibility, reliability, and honesty. Employees emphasised that the way information is shared—whether transparent, partial, or delayed shapes their willingness to rely on management and align their actions with organisational directives. Three primary themes emerged under this question: transparency and trust, participatory communication, and empathy in communication. These themes collectively illustrate the link between internal communication strategies and the establishment or erosion of trust during crises.

#### **4.4.1 Transparency and Trust**

Transparency emerged as a critical factor in fostering trust between employees and management during crises. Participants consistently highlighted that when information is openly shared, even when it involves negative developments, their confidence in leadership increases. P2 emphasised, “When management openly explains what has gone wrong and what they are doing to fix it, I feel reassured that they are not hiding anything, and that builds trust.” Similarly, P7 reflected, “I remember a situation last year where the management was upfront about a financial setback. Even though it was concerning news, knowing the reality made me feel that they valued our understanding and involvement.”

Participants pointed to situations where transparency was lacking, which undermined trust. P4 remarked, “Sometimes we get vague updates with no real explanation. It makes me question if management is fully aware or if they are trying to shield us from problems.” P9 provided a more detailed account, stating, “During the logistics crisis, some departments received detailed reports, while others barely got any information. It felt like selective disclosure. This created tension and doubt, because if management were truly transparent, everyone should be on the same page.”

These findings align with SCCT, which emphasises that appropriate disclosure and honesty are central to protecting stakeholder trust and organisational reputation during crises (Coombs, 2022). The participants' experiences also resonate with Men et al. (2024), who argue that transparency not only strengthens trust but also enhances employees' engagement and willingness to cooperate in managing the crisis. Conversely, instances of partial or unclear communication corroborate Qin et al.'s (2023) observation that perceived secrecy or selective messaging can trigger skepticism, reduce commitment, and negatively affect organisational cohesion. The study confirms that transparency is a key determinant of employee trust at COCOBOD during periods of crisis.

#### **4.4.2 Responsiveness and Trust Development**

Responsiveness was highlighted by participants as a key factor in shaping their trust in management during crises. Employees noted that timely replies to questions, prompt updates, and active engagement from managers reinforced confidence and reassured staff that their concerns were being acknowledged. P3 emphasised that “When we ask questions or seek clarification, how quickly management responds matters a lot. Waiting days without a response makes you feel that your concerns are not valued, but prompt responses make you trust them more.”

Several participants described instances where responsiveness strengthened their sense of reliability in leadership. P6 explained that “during the supply chain disruption last year, management held daily briefings and addressed all the questions we had. That consistency and willingness to engage made me feel like they were genuinely committed to keeping everyone informed and supported.” Similarly, P1 highlighted, “Even small updates matter. I remember a time when a minor technical problem caused delays. Management sent updates every few

hours. Knowing they were monitoring the situation and communicating regularly made me confident that they were in control.”

Conversely, delayed or inconsistent responses were perceived negatively. P8 commented, “There were moments when we sent emails for clarification, and it took weeks to get a reply. By then, rumours had started circulating, and trust in management dipped because it seemed like they didn’t care.” P10 added, “Sometimes, updates come only after the issue has escalated. It feels reactive rather than proactive, and that makes it harder to trust management’s competence during crises.”

The findings corroborate Men et al. (2024), who argue that responsiveness not only facilitates information flow but also signals leadership’s attentiveness, which is critical in maintaining employee trust. They also echo Gil-Lopez et al. (2023), who observed that participatory and timely engagement during crises enhances relational trust and organisational cohesion. Conversely, delays in communication reflect the risks identified by Ravazzani (2023), where gaps in responsiveness can undermine confidence and amplify uncertainty among staff. Overall, employees at COCOBOD perceive that responsive communication is instrumental in developing and sustaining trust during crises, highlighting its importance alongside transparency.

#### **4.4.3 Consistency and Trust Stability**

Consistency in internal crisis communication emerged as a central factor influencing employees’ perception of management reliability and the stability of trust during turbulent periods. Participants highlighted that messages delivered uniformly across different channels and from multiple managerial levels helped prevent confusion and reinforced confidence in

leadership. P2 emphasised, “When the message is the same from the department head and senior management, you feel there is no hidden agenda. Consistent information reassures you that everyone is on the same page.”

Several participants elaborated on how inconsistencies eroded trust. P5 stated, “During the last policy shift, different units communicated contradictory instructions. I was unsure which guidelines to follow, and it made me question whether management actually had control of the situation.” P7 added, “If one manager says one thing and another contradicts it, it creates unnecessary stress. You begin to doubt the competence of leadership, even if the crisis is external and beyond their control.”

Conversely, consistent communication practices were praised for maintaining stability in employee trust. P4 reflected, “Even when the news wasn’t good, the fact that all updates were aligned and clear from top management kept us calm. We trusted that decisions were being made deliberately and thoughtfully.” P9 highlighted, “Knowing that management communicates regularly with the same message prevents rumours from spreading. That consistency is a trust anchor, especially when the crisis is ongoing and unpredictable.”

These findings align with literature emphasising the role of consistency in reinforcing trust during organisational crises. Zerfass et al. (2020) argue that inconsistent messaging increases employee anxiety and undermines perceived leadership competence. Men et al. (2024) also note that alignment in communication across hierarchical levels strengthens organisational cohesion and preserves trust under pressure. The experiences of COCOBOD employees indicate that consistent communication not only prevents misinformation but also stabilises

trust, serving as a crucial mechanism for sustaining confidence in management throughout crises.

#### **4.5 RQ3: WHAT ARE THE MAIN BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE INTERNAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION AT COCOBOD?**

The third research objective sought to explore the main barriers that impede effective internal crisis communication at COCOBOD. Understanding these barriers is critical because they shape how employees receive, interpret, and respond to information during organisational crises. Analysis of participant responses revealed three primary themes: structural and hierarchical bottlenecks, technological and resource limitations, and cultural and interpersonal factors. Each theme reflects both practical and perceptual obstacles that influence the flow and effectiveness of internal communication during critical periods.

##### **4.5.1 Structural and Hierarchical Bottlenecks**

Participants consistently highlighted that COCOBOD's hierarchical organisational structure often slowed the dissemination of information and created barriers to timely communication. P1 stated, "Sometimes you have to wait for approvals through multiple layers before anything is communicated. By the time the message reaches us, the situation has already moved on." Similarly, P3 emphasised that strict reporting lines limit direct access to decision-makers: "If you want clarity during a crisis, you cannot just ask the head directly; you have to go through three levels of management. It slows everything down."

Several participants noted that these structural bottlenecks could result in mixed messages or information gaps. P6 reflected,

Because each department passes the message down differently, sometimes key details are left out. It's not intentional, but the hierarchy makes quick, accurate communication very difficult.

P8 added a broader perspective, highlighting that rigid structures can also affect employee morale: "When information is delayed or unclear due to bureaucratic procedures, staff feel left out and start speculating. It affects trust and confidence in leadership."

These insights are consistent with findings in organisational communication literature. Kreps (2019) and Ravazzani (2023) argue that hierarchical complexity often obstructs effective communication during crises, particularly in public sector institutions where multiple approval layers are common. Structural bottlenecks can therefore amplify uncertainty and reduce employee engagement, highlighting the importance of flattening communication channels or introducing mechanisms to expedite information flow during crises. The experiences of COCOBOD employees suggest that addressing these hierarchical barriers is crucial to improving timeliness, clarity, and trust in internal crisis communication.

#### **4.5.2 Limited Feedback Mechanisms**

Participants frequently noted that the absence of robust feedback mechanisms at COCOBOD hindered effective internal crisis communication. P2 highlighted that employees often receive information passively without opportunities to clarify or respond: "We get memos or emails, but there is rarely a chance to ask questions or provide input. It feels one-way, and sometimes we don't fully understand what is expected of us." P5 emphasised that this limitation reduces employee engagement during crises: "When management doesn't invite feedback, staff tend to guess what to do, which sometimes leads to mistakes or unnecessary confusion."

Several participants explained that limited feedback channels exacerbate misunderstandings and delay problem-solving. P7 stated, “If there were structured forums or quick check-ins after an announcement, we could clarify doubts immediately. Instead, misinterpretations linger, and they affect how we respond to urgent tasks.” P9 added a broader reflection on morale: “Not being able to voice concerns makes you feel overlooked. During crises, this lack of dialogue can create frustration and lower trust in leadership.”

These observations align with literature emphasising the importance of two-way communication in crisis management. Men et al. (2024) argue that participatory communication, where employees can express opinions and ask questions, enhances understanding and reinforces trust. Similarly, Gil-Lopez et al. (2023) note that feedback mechanisms enable organisations to identify misunderstandings early and adapt messaging accordingly. The experiences of COCOBOD employees suggest that introducing structured feedback channels such as team debriefings, interactive briefings, or digital Q&A platforms could significantly improve internal communication effectiveness during crises.

#### **4.5.3 Organisational Culture Constraints**

Participants frequently identified aspects of COCOBOD’s organisational culture as constraining effective internal crisis communication. P3 highlighted the hierarchical and risk-averse nature of the institution, stating, “There is a culture of waiting for instructions from above, and people hesitate to speak up, even when they notice something important. During crises, this slows down response and information sharing.” P6 emphasised how fear of criticism limits open communication: “Employees often keep concerns to themselves because they worry about being blamed. It makes it hard for management to know what is actually happening on the ground.”

Several participants linked cultural norms to reduced transparency and limited initiative. P1 remarked, “Sometimes, even when we have ideas or solutions during a crisis, we hold back because the culture discourages challenging decisions or questioning procedures. This leads to gaps in communication and delays.” P8 reflected on informal communication patterns, noting, “Many staff rely on whispers and informal networks rather than official channels because that feels safer. But this creates rumours and confusion instead of clear, reliable information.”

These insights resonate with existing literature on organisational culture and crisis communication. Qin et al. (2023) argue that a culture that discourages open dialogue and employee initiative can undermine the timeliness and accuracy of internal communications. Ravazzani (2023) also highlights that hierarchical rigidity and fear of reprisal reduce information flow, weakening employee engagement and trust. The experiences at COCOBOD suggest that fostering a culture that encourages speaking up, supports transparency, and values employee input could enhance the effectiveness of internal crisis communication and ensure that critical information reaches the right people promptly.

#### **4.6 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of how internal crisis communication is perceived by employees at COCOBOD, its impact on trust in management, and the barriers that impede effective information flow. By examining the three research questions collectively, it is possible to draw connections between communication practices, employee perceptions, and organisational outcomes. The cross-analysis highlights interrelationships among timeliness, clarity, adequacy, trust, and structural and cultural

constraints, revealing both strengths and weaknesses in the institution's internal communication framework.

With respect to the first research question, employees' perceptions of timeliness, clarity, and adequacy of communication revealed that while management generally attempted to disseminate information during crises, significant gaps persisted. Timeliness emerged as a central concern, with several participants noting that delays in receiving critical information often exacerbated uncertainty and anxiety. This finding aligns with Men et al. (2024), who contend that prompt communication is essential to reducing uncertainty and maintaining employee engagement during crises. However, the observation that updates were sometimes delayed or uneven across departments highlights a limitation in practice that contradicts the ideal of proactive crisis communication described in global literature (Ravazzani, 2023; Gil-Lopez et al., 2023). Clarity, as revealed by participants, was inconsistent: while some messages were straightforward, others were perceived as ambiguous or overly technical, echoing Zerfass et al.'s (2020) assertion that clarity and consistency are crucial for ensuring employees understand their roles and responsibilities. Similarly, communication adequacy was uneven, with employees expressing frustration over incomplete information or insufficient follow-up, suggesting that COCOBOD's internal communications do not always satisfy informational needs comprehensively. This corroborates Mazzei and Ravazzani's (2019) emphasis on the importance of depth, relevance, and responsiveness in internal crisis communication.

Research question two explored the relationship between internal crisis communication and employee trust in management. The findings indicate that transparency, responsiveness, and consistency are pivotal in shaping trust during crises. Participants highlighted that open and honest communication reinforced their confidence in leadership, whereas delayed,

inconsistent, or opaque messages eroded trust. These findings support the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which posits that stakeholder perceptions of organisational actions critically influence trust and reputational outcomes (Coombs, 2022; Wang et al., 2022). For example, P4's account of management providing timely, empathetic updates during a recent operational challenge reinforced the notion that consistent and transparent communication builds credibility. Conversely, accounts of withheld information or inconsistent messaging illustrate the potential for reputational damage and distrust, reflecting critiques in the literature that SCCT often underestimates internal stakeholder dynamics (Qin et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2019). Thus, the study affirms the relevance of SCCT but also suggests the need to extend its application to internal communication contexts in public sector organisations, particularly in developing countries.

The third research question focused on barriers to effective internal crisis communication. Structural and hierarchical bottlenecks, limited feedback mechanisms, and cultural constraints emerged as dominant themes. Participants emphasised that rigid chains of command, fear of reprisal, and informal communication networks impede timely and accurate information dissemination. These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that bureaucratic structures, risk-averse cultures, and hierarchical constraints limit employees' ability to participate in crisis communication (Ravazzani, 2023; Qin et al., 2023). Moreover, the study highlights how these structural and cultural challenges are interlinked with employee perceptions of timeliness, clarity, and adequacy. For instance, delayed messages were often attributed to hierarchical approval processes, while lack of clarity and incomplete information were connected to cultural tendencies toward guarded communication and reliance on informal channels.

The cross-analysis of the three research questions underscores that internal crisis communication cannot be examined in isolation. Perceptions of communication quality directly influence trust, and both are shaped by organisational structures and culture. When communication is timely, clear, and adequate, employees feel informed, included, and confident in management decisions. Conversely, structural delays, unclear messaging, and cultural constraints create uncertainty, weaken trust, and reduce organisational resilience.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that while COCOBOD has established some mechanisms for internal crisis communication, challenges related to timeliness, clarity, adequacy, and cultural and structural constraints persist. These challenges affect employee perceptions and, by extension, trust in management, underscoring the need for strategic interventions that integrate communication quality, participatory practices, and cultural transformation.

#### **4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the findings of the study, examining employee perceptions of internal crisis communication at COCOBOD, its impact on trust in management, and the barriers that impede effective communication. Analysis of the three research questions revealed that timeliness, clarity, and adequacy of communication significantly shape employees' experiences, while transparency, responsiveness, and consistency are central to fostering trust. Structural, cultural, and feedback-related challenges were identified as key obstacles to effective communication. The findings both support and extend existing literature, highlighting the critical role of organisational context in shaping internal crisis communication outcomes. These insights set the stage for Chapter Five, which will provide a comprehensive discussion

of conclusions, practical recommendations, and implications for policy and practice within COCOBOD and similar public sector organisations.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the summary of the study, conclusions drawn from the findings, and practical recommendations for improving internal crisis communication at COCOBOD. The chapter revisits the research objectives, integrates findings across the three research questions, and situates them within the broader scholarly and organisational context. Implications for theory, practice, and future research are also discussed, offering guidance for public sector organisations seeking to strengthen internal communication during crises.

#### **5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

The study investigated employee perceptions of internal crisis communication at the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) and explored how these communications influence trust in management while identifying the barriers that hinder effective information flow. Guided by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), the research adopted a qualitative case study design and collected data through semi-structured interviews with ten employees across various hierarchical levels at the COCOBOD headquarters in Accra.

The study focused on three core research questions: (1) How employees perceive the timeliness, clarity, and adequacy of internal crisis communication; (2) How internal crisis communication affects employee trust in management; and (3) What barriers limit effective internal crisis communication at COCOBOD. Thematic analysis of the interview data yielded

insights into both the strengths and challenges of the organisation's communication practices during crises.

### **5.3 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS**

This section synthesises the major findings of the study in direct relation to the research objectives. In relation to the first objective, which sought to examine employee's perceptions of timeliness, clarity and adequacy of internal communication, findings indicate that timely communication is crucial during crises, as delays exacerbate uncertainty and anxiety. Clarity of messages was highlighted as essential to prevent misinterpretation, with participants noting that overly technical or incomplete information often confused. Adequacy of communication covering the depth, frequency, and relevance of information was considered important for employees to feel informed and engaged in crisis responses.

Concerning the second objective, which explored the role of internal crisis communication in shaping employee trust in management, the study found that transparency, responsiveness, and consistency in communication strongly shapes trust in management. Employees reported that transparent and empathetic communication fostered confidence in leadership, while inconsistent or opaque messaging eroded trust and heightened skepticism. Responsiveness to employee concerns during crises was seen as reinforcing a sense of inclusion and organisational loyalty

The third objective aimed to identify barriers to effective internal crisis communication, and the findings reveal that structural and hierarchical bottlenecks, limited feedback mechanisms, and cultural constraints emerged as major barriers. Employees indicated that rigid chains of command delayed information flow, while inadequate channels for feedback restricted two-way communication. Cultural norms emphasising deference to authority sometimes

discouraged open dialogue, limiting opportunities for employees to contribute insights or raise concerns during crises.

These findings both support and extend the literature. Timeliness, clarity, and adequacy align with global studies emphasising the importance of these dimensions for effective crisis communication (Men et al., 2024; Ravazzani, 2023). Similarly, the influence of communication on trust corroborates prior research linking transparency and responsiveness to employee confidence in leadership (Qin et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022). The study, however, highlights the pronounced impact of organisational and cultural constraints in a Ghanaian public sector context, an area less emphasised in existing SCCT applications.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSIONS**

From the findings, it can be concluded that internal crisis communication at COCOBOD plays a pivotal role in shaping employee experiences and trust. Effective communication during crises requires not only timely, clear, and adequate information but also transparency, responsiveness, and consistency from management. However, organisational hierarchies, limited feedback channels, and cultural norms significantly hinder the effectiveness of internal communication. These barriers, if unaddressed, may compromise employee engagement, trust, and overall organisational resilience in the face of crises.

The study also demonstrates that SCCT is a useful framework for analysing internal crisis communication, but its traditional focus on external stakeholders must be adapted to include internal employees as critical recipients of crisis messages, particularly in public sector organisations operating in developing country contexts.

## **5.5 PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The study contributes to both theory validating SCCT in an internal communication context while highlighting the importance of organisational culture and structure in shaping employees' experiences of crisis communication. The study also has several practical implications. First, management should prioritise timely and consistent communication during crises, with particular attention to the speed and reach of messages across hierarchical levels. Second, clarity and adequacy must be improved by providing sufficient context, actionable guidance, and follow-up updates. Third, feedback mechanisms need strengthening to allow employees to voice concerns and provide insights that can inform crisis responses. Finally, fostering a culture of openness, psychological safety, and trust is essential for ensuring that employees feel empowered to share information and participate constructively during crises. Addressing these areas can enhance organisational resilience, strengthen employee trust, and improve COCOBOD's overall crisis management capacity.

## **5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **Enhance Timeliness and Clarity:** Management should develop protocols for the rapid dissemination of information during crises, ensuring messages are clear, concise, and easily understood across all levels.
2. **Strengthen Feedback Mechanisms:** Introduce structured channels for employees to ask questions, provide feedback, and share concerns during crises. This can include suggestion platforms, dedicated emails, or regular team briefings.

3. Foster a Transparent and Responsive Culture: Leadership should prioritise transparency and actively demonstrate responsiveness to employee needs, acknowledging concerns and updating staff regularly.
4. Address Structural Bottlenecks: Review hierarchical communication pathways and identify areas where information flow can be streamlined to reduce delays and ensure inclusivity.
5. Promote Cultural Shift Toward Open Dialogue: Encourage a participatory communication culture where employees feel safe to express opinions without fear of negative consequences, emphasising collaboration over strict hierarchy.

## **5.7 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study provides valuable insights into employee perceptions of internal crisis communication at COCOBOD, but it is not without limitations. First, the study employed a single case study design focused exclusively on COCOBOD headquarters in Accra. While this approach enabled an in-depth exploration of communication practices within one institution, it limits the generalizability of the findings to other public sector organisations in Ghana or beyond. Future research could address this limitation by conducting comparative studies across multiple public sector institutions in Ghana, in order to identify common patterns and unique contextual factors that shape internal crisis communication across different organisational settings, thereby enhancing the transferability of findings.

Second, the study adopted a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews with ten participants. While this method provided rich, detailed insights into employees' lived experiences, it did not capture the breadth of perspectives that a larger sample might offer, nor did it allow for statistical generalisation or the measurement of relationships between variables.

The relatively small sample size, though appropriate for thematic saturation in qualitative research, means that certain employee experiences or perspectives may not have been fully represented. Future research could complement these qualitative findings by employing mixed-methods designs that combine qualitative depth with quantitative breadth.

Third, the study employed a cross-sectional design, capturing employee perceptions at a single point in time. This approach does not account for how perceptions and trust may evolve over the course of multiple crises or how communication practices may improve or deteriorate in response to organisational learning. Future research should consider longitudinal designs that track employee perceptions and trust levels across multiple crisis events over an extended period.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1.0: Interview Guide

#### INTERVIEW GUIDE

##### Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. This interview is part of a study on how internal communication works at COCOBOD during times of crisis. I'm interested in your personal experiences and observations, there are no right or wrong answers. Everything you share will remain confidential and used only for academic purposes.

##### Section A: Background Information

1. Could you please tell me your current role or position at COCOBOD?
2. How long have you been with the organization?
3. How would you describe communication in COCOBOD in general, both in normal times and when things get a bit challenging?

##### Section B: General Understanding of Crisis Communication

4. When you hear the term *crisis communication*, what does it mean to you in the context of COCOBOD?
5. From your perspective, what kinds of situations or events would you consider a "crisis" for the organization?
6. How does the organization typically communicate with staff when such situations arise?
7. In your view, what makes internal crisis communication effective or ineffective?
8. How comfortable do you feel sharing your own concerns or feedback with management during a crisis?

### **Section C: Timeliness, Clarity, and Adequacy of Communication**

9. In your experience, how timely is communication from management when a crisis occurs?
10. Can you recall a time when the timing of a message affected how you responded or carried out your work?
11. How would you describe the clarity of information shared by management during a crisis?
12. Have there been moments when you felt the information was incomplete or confusing?  
Could you share an example?

### **Section D: Communication and Trust in Management**

13. How does management's approach to communication during crises influence your level of trust in their leadership?
14. Can you describe a situation where transparent or effective communication strengthened that trust?
15. On the other hand, have you ever experienced poor communication that made you doubt management decisions or intentions?
16. What kind of communication style or approach do you think helps maintain trust between staff and management during difficult times?

### **Section E: Barriers to Effective Internal Crisis Communication**

17. What do you think are the main barriers or challenges that affect internal communication during crises at COCOBOD?
18. Does the organizational structure or chain of command make information flow slower or more restricted in any way?

19. Are there any cultural, technological, or resource issues that make communication more difficult?
20. What changes do you think could help the organization communicate more effectively during crises?

**Section F: Recommendations and Reflections**

21. If you could advise management on improving internal crisis communication, what would you suggest?
22. What lessons do you think COCOBOD can learn from past crises about how to communicate better?
23. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience with crisis communication in the organization?

## Appendix 2.0: Codes and Themes

### CODES

Delayed updates  
Reactive communication  
Uneven information flow  
Rapid rumor spread  
Occasional prompt alerts  
Long decision pipelines

Ambiguous wording  
Mixed messages from units  
Technical language barriers  
Overly brief announcements  
Clarification sought informally  
Confusion around directives

Insufficient detail  
Irregular updates  
High dependence on informal channels  
Lack of follow-up  
Partial disclosure  
Missing context in messages

Open sharing of crisis details  
Leadership honesty  
Disclosure gaps  
Managing fears proactively  
Intentional reassurance  
Avoiding withheld information

Quick managerial feedback  
Slow response to staff concerns  
Inconsistent crisis engagement  
Delayed clarification  
Lack of acknowledgement  
Responsiveness influenced trust

Unified messaging  
Contradictory instructions  
Fragmented communication lines  
Stable communication patterns  
Frequent message changes  
Differing statements from directors

Long reporting chain  
Top-down communication  
Delayed approvals  
Leadership bottlenecks

### THEMES

Perceptions of Timeliness

Perceptions of Clarity

Perceptions of Communication Adequacy

Transparency and Trust

Responsiveness and Trust Development

Consistency and Trust Stability

Structural and Hierarchical Bottlenecks

Information filtering  
Rigid communication structure

Weak upward communication  
No anonymous channels  
Fear of speaking up  
Feedback often ignored  
Lack of participatory spaces  
Discouraged open dialogue

Risk-averse environment  
Fear of blame  
Preference for informal communication  
Reluctance to question authority  
Culture of silence  
Low tolerance for dissent

Limited Feedback Mechanisms

Organisational Culture Constraints