

**GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM  
(SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH)**

**PUBLIC RELATIONS AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN GOVERNMENT  
ORGANIZATIONS: EXAMINING CORE ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF PUBLIC  
RELATIONS WITHIN THE THREE STAGE APPROACH TO MANAGING CRISES**

**BY**

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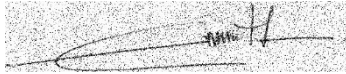
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**OCTOBER, 2020**

**STUDENT'S DECLARATION**

I Kafui Mensah hereby declare that this long essay is my own original work and do not contain any unacknowledged work from any other source. I also declare that I have been under supervision for this report herein submitted.



..01-10-2020...

.....

**SIGNATURE**

**DATE**

**SUPERVISOR’S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the preparation of this dissertation was supervised by me in accordance with the guidelines of supervision of dissertation laid down by the Ghana Institute of Journalism. This research project is submitted for examination with my approval as university supervisor.

.....

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**(Dr. Mavis Essandoh)**

.....

**DATE**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research work to my lovely wife Benedicta Hamid and my daughter Kekeli Kafkeli Ama Mensah. I equally dedicate this work to Mr. Alfred Yao Doe Agbosu and to the memory of my late mum Madam Ellen Agbolosoo.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Public Relations (PR) is an essential part of organizations. Institutions rely greatly on the functions played by PR to facilitate information between top management and their internal and external publics. The role of PR is deeply seethed in management of communication channels and communication between organizations and their publics. One critical role of PR in organizations is the management of crisis situations. The role of PR here is even more important as crisis situations have the capacity to destroy organizations.

This paper focuses on the role of PR in managing crisis in government organizations. The paper's core objective is to understand the role of PR in managing crisis in government organization while paying specific attention to the three-stage model of crisis management. The paper argues that it essential to understand what roles PR plays in the various stages of three-stage approach in order to better understand the role of PR in crisis management.

The paper was a desk research and employed the use of secondary data assessed from e-journals, e-documents, e-books etc. The paper finds that PR has critical roles to play in all three stages (pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis) of the three-stage crisis management approach. The paper finds that research, internal crisis communication, image/reputation repair and training are some core roles PR plays during crisis situations.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background of the Study

One critical aspect of organizations that enhances continued growth, development and interactivity between organizations and their publics is Public Relations (PR). It is no doubt that Public Relations (PR) is taking centre stage in the activities of corporate organizations recently (Grunig, 2011). The shift from being an almost ‘unnecessary’ practice in the corporate world to becoming a core spine for organization sustenance and development for many organizations can be seen described as a shift that is nothing less than revolutionary and radical (Wilcox, 2006; Gilaninia, Taleghani, & Mohammadi, 2013). Wilcox (2006) accounts that Public Relations is now well established across organizations all over the world. In the last decade, the PR landscape has taken a major growth turn such that, attempting to define or explain the concept of the practice is a herculean task (p.67).

The essence as well as prominence of the practice of Public relations stretch from diverse organizations to organizations be it Non Governmental Organizations, private corporations, professional trade union groups, activist groups, professional individuals and even governments. The practice of PR has come to present a paradigm shift from the way organizations used to interact with their publics, which used to be one-way communication format. Now, PR has enforced a two-way communication format that allows corporate organizations and individuals interact effectively with their publics (Wilcox, 2006; Grunig, 2011; Willacy, 2016). Through PR practice, organizations are now closer to their public, while PR further enhances a feeling of belongingness and close proximity to organizations.

The core business of effective public relations however, is not only to ensure interactivity between organizations and their publics. The function, role or relevance of public relations is embedded deeply within every facet of organizations. Thus, the roles and functions of Public relations are diverse, far-reaching, complex and of high benefit to organizations (Gilaninia, Taleghani, & Mohammadi, 2013; Rivero & Theodore, 2014). The roles and importance of PR stretch from a vast array of facets within organizations such as organizational development and growth (Gqamane, 2010); organizational sustainability (Rivero & Theodore, 2014); strategic management (Grunig & Grunig, 2000); organizational brands management and marketing (Mikacova, 2013); reputation management (Waton & Kitchen, 2010). Evidently, the practice of PR has relevance that stretch through vast sections of the operations of every organization. One critical area where Public Relations is perhaps most relevant is within the area of managing organizational crisis (Sapriel, 2003).

Day in, day out, organizations are faced consistently with numerous challenges and crisis. This is mostly because the environments within which many organizations work are highly risky with diverse socio-political and economic risk factors as well as competition (Hamidovic, 2012). Additionally, organizations face crisis because crisis situations are mostly inevitable and organizations cannot prevent them entirely but map out strategies to reduce how they are affected by them (Valenca, 1992; Powell, 2010). Crisis situations if not carefully and effectively managed have the potency to cause crucial disruption in the operations of organizations. In some cases crisis situations can developed into complex situations that account for the eventual closure of orgnizations that have been affected by such crisis situations (Probst & Raisch, Organizational Crisis - The Logic of Failure, 2005; Sontiate, 2014). However, even in the depths of crisis, organizations could manage situations in effective ways to survive and scale

up their businesses. According to Hamidovic (2012) effective crisis management reduces of the likelihood of experiencing disruptions in organization; shortens the period of the disruptions; and limits the impact of the disruption on the business and operations of the organization.

Due to the devastating effects of crisis situations on organizations, it is critical that organizations pay crucial attention to devising ways and means to mitigate such situations when they hit. Crisis situations affect all kinds of organizations. Thus, as crisis situations and PR practice differ from organization to organization, so do organizations experience even the same crisis differently. Hence it is imperative that organizations develop their own form of response strategies to tackle these crisis (Mishra, 1996). It is therefore apt to state that regardless the sector an organization operates in, it is essential to develop well knit crisis response strategy for such organization and the sepcific crisis they face.

The practice of PR within government organization is as critical as it is in its practice in private corporations and professional individuals. Governemt organizations rely heavily on the practice of PR to develop mutually beneficial communication strategies to effectively communicate with the governed. Governemnt public relations is also important in advancing missions, ideals and acheivements of governments to the governed. Public Relations within government organizations increase the efficiency of communication and also strategic relationship building with other stakeholders and publics (Dolea, 2012). In fact, public relations is even more important within government institutions as it enables the apt and effective management of crisis situations within government organizations. (Ping, Tingru & Pan, 2011; Tokakis, Polychronious & Boustras, 2019).

The core concern of this paper is to critically examine the role of Public Relations in crisis management in government organizations. Specifically, the paper will concern an analysis of the role of PR in managing crisis that hit government institutions by employing critical analysis of the roles within the 3 stages of crisis management.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Since the turn of the decade, the practice of Public Relations has been given more and more attention. PR has received a considerable degree of relevance within industrial practice as many organizations now recognize and acknowledge the roles of PR in organisations as top management roles. Similarly, there has been increased attention paid towards the study and research of public relations and its functions. Some studies have examined in a critical sense, what the practice and concept of Public Relations is (McKie & Sriramesh, 2017). Many researchers have focused on understanding the practice of PR as a top part of top management of organizations and its roles (Sterne, 2008; Anggreni, 2018) others have intently focused the specific roles and benefits of PR within organizations (Mykkaen & Vos, 2015; Shamsan & Otieno, 2015). Literature has thus focused extensively on what PR is and its functions and roles.

Within the scope of crisis management and public relations nexus, authors have paid much attention to how public relations is used as a tool in managing organizational crisis (Fall, 2004; Achammara, 2008; Alzahrani, 2016; Kacewska & Bsoul, 2017). Other studies have also argued crisis management as a Public Relations functions (Grünig, 2001). Regardless, literature points out that there is adequate scholarly attention given to the phenomenon. Crisis management researchers have focused extensively on managing crisis within corporate organisations.

Authors such as Hamidovic (2012); Sinha (2011); Oparanma, (2014) and Taneja, Pryor, Sewell and Recuero (2014) have thus researched specifically on managing crisis in corporate organizations. They argue on a vast array of issues concerning crisis prevention, crisis response strategies and crisis communication strategies between organizations and their publics (both internal and external). The focus of such studies have been looking at how corporate organizations experience, survive and restore organizational operations when crisis hit them. Other studies have also looked extensively at how the crisis management and PR nexus plays out within government agencies and institutions. Hence authors such as Tekin (2014); (Olsson, 2014); Lemonakis and Zairis (2020) amongst others have focused extensively on the role of public relations in managing crisis in government organizations or public sector organizations. The focus of these studies to a large extent has been to describe how Public Relations practice within respective government organizations mitigate crisis situations. However, their focus do not specify how PR practice affects organizational strategies and decisions during the three phases (pre-crisis, crisis, and post crisis) of crisis situations. Meanwhile Boudreaux (2005); Tokakis, Polychroniou and Boustras (2019) have argued that it is essential to adopt the three stage model approach to crisis management (i.e pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis phases) while studying crisis management in institutions. The core focus of this paper is therefore to identify Public Relations strategies that are employed within each of the three phases of crisis management processes. Hence, the paper seeks to look critically at the role PR plays in managing crisis in government organizations while adopting the three phase model to crisis management in doing this.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this paper is to examine the role of PR in managing crisis in government organizations. To achieve this, the paper seeks to achieve the following specific objectives.

- To understand the role of Public Relations in managing crisis within government organizations during the pre-crisis phase
- To understand the role of Public Relations in managing crisis within government organizations during the crisis phase
- To understand the role of Public Relations in managing crisis within government organizations during the post crisis phase

## **1.3 Research Questions**

1. What is the role of Public Relations in managing crisis within government organizations during the pre-crisis phase?
2. What is the role of Public Relations in managing crisis within government organizations during the crisis phase?
3. What is the role of Public Relations in managing crisis during the post-crisis phase?

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The paper focuses on the role of Public Relations in managing crisis in government organizations. The paper focuses on this by adopting the 3 phase model approach in managing crisis situations in government institutions. The core area of this paper's focus is to critically examine what PR strategies can be adopted within each specific phase of the model to mitigate crisis situations. In doing this, the paper will hold critical importance to the practice of public relations. The study which emphasizes the role of PR in managing crisis will present PR

practitioners with information on what strategies to adopt when faced with crisis situations. Additionally, for PR practitioners who worked in the public sector, the paper will offer a means of strategizing effectively to meet communication needs of publics during crisis situations.

This paper will further seek to add to existing literature within academia. The study will be an immense contributor to academic literature especially within the area of Public Relations in government organizations and Crisis management.

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

This paper is a desk or secondary research and will consider critical assessment of existing literature concerning the practice of the role of Public Relations in managing crisis in government institutions. The scope of this paper is therefore limited to secondary data concerning public relations practice in public institutions, crisis management in government institutions and the application of the three phase model approach to crisis management.

### **1.6 Organization of the Study**

This paper is structured into five chapters. Chapter one is an introduction to the paper. Chapter one discusses the problem and the objectives of this paper. Chapter two regards review of literature concerning Public Relations, Crisis management and the 3 stage model approach to crisis management. The chapter also discusses empirical studies conducted on crisis management in organizations. Chapter three presents the methodology of this study. Chapter three discusses secondary data and desk research methods as methods for this paper. Chapter four presents the findings made after the secondary data were assessed for the paper. Chapter five summarizes the paper, offers a conclusion and presents some recommendations as well.

## **1.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the background of the study as well as the statement of the problem. It further, presented the research objectives and questions for the study, the significance of the study and its scope as well as the organisation of the study.

The next chapter will discuss the conceptual underpinnings of this study as well as the theories underpinning it. It will further present a review of related studies to situate the present study in an existing body of literature.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This section of the paper focuses on exploring concepts that underpin the phenomenon under study. The paper focuses on explaining in depth, the concepts of Public Relations, Crisis, and Crisis Management. Furthermore, this section also centres on reviewing literature concerning the practice of PR in government organizations and how crisis situations are managed in government institutions. Additionally, the three phase model to crisis management is espoused as theoretical underpinnings of this paper. Hence, the paper will explain the three-phase model to crisis management as a framework underpinning this paper.

#### **2.1 Public Relations**

Public Relations (PR) is used in a huge range of industries and in each on slightly different skills and competencies have emerged among practitioners. As a result there is no one universally agreed definition of PR (Gruning 1992; L'Etang 1996; White & Mazur 1996; Moloney 200). The probability is that if you ask three practitioners and three academics to define PR, all six answers will be different in some way. Harlow (1976) found 472 different definitions of PR coined between 1900 and 1976, he built his own definitions from these findings. Tench and Yoemans (2006, p.4). Gruning and Hunt (1984, p.6) , however, defined PR in one sentence as “the management of communication between an organization and its publics’.

Other definitions (Msimangira, 2012; Zainnuddin & Djusan, 2015; Willacy, 2016) focused on ‘ideal’ communications practices: two way communications and building positive relationships between organizations and their publics.

In 1978, the First World assembly of Public Relations Associations in Mexico defined PR as ‘the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organizational leaders, and implementing planned programs of actions which will serve both organization and the public interest (Newsom et al. 2000, p.2) the definition offered by the public Relations Society of America, coined in 1988, is similarly broad’: Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other’ (Public Relations Society of America, 2004).

The Institute of Public Relations (IPR) define the concept of Public relations as “the distinctive and strategic management art and social science function, based on an understanding of human behavior, that identifies issues of critical relevance, analyzes trends and predicts their consequences, and establishes and maintains mutually-beneficial relationships based on truth, full information, responsibility, performance and the public interest”(IPR, p.6). The definition suggests that the concept of public relations transcend the popular social perception that public relations in an information transfer system that deals with only relaying information from management of an organization to the organization’s publics. Obviously, the concept considers more than that. The concept encompasses the systematic identification of issues that are of importance to the organization, striving to establish long lasting relationships between the organization and its publics and also maintain and develop public perception of the organization’s image.

In defining the concept of Public Relations, Cutlip et al (2000, p. 8) add that “public relations is a management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics whom its success or failure depends.” Furthermore, Bussey (2011) identifies the concept as the art of presenting a company (or a person) to the public, usually via the media, ideally in a positive manner that improves the reputation of that company (or person) and subsequently impacts positively on that company’s sales/uptake of that company’s services or the company’s overall reputation. The practice of Public Relations therefore regards the satisfaction of an organization’s publics despite the fact that it maintains keen interest in managing the image and perceptions of the organization.

In attempting a definition to contemporary practice of Public Relations in organizations, Bekoe (2012) believes that the practice in recent times has travelled beyond establishment of mutually beneficial relationships, and organizational image although these are core tenets of the practice. She avers that, Public relations “manages by objectives, implements programs and evaluates them, plays a role in marketing because institutions don’t just build images but must make profit, handles special events and protocol” (p. 11). Additionally, Bekoe (2012) acknowledges that one essential part of public relations is crisis management as public relations “manages crises and issues, which always come up and should be handled professionally (p. 11)”.

## **2.2 The Roles of Public Relations**

The roles of Public Relations in organizations differ and cover a vast array of section within organizations. Scholars propose that understanding the roles of Public Relations within an organization is no little task because organizations differ greatly. However, Broom and Smith (1979) espouse key groups of roles that efficient Public Relations play in every organization. They group the numerous organizational roles of PR into four (4) core groups. These groups

are expert prescriber, communication facilitator, problem solving process facilitator, and corporate communication technician. The four groups of roles as espoused by Broom and Smith are essential to understanding how PR functions and the contributions it makes to organizational development (Moss & Green, 2001; Adjei, 2015).

- **The expert prescriber:** Here, PR practitioner researches to identify a problem, defines it and develops solutions to that problem and its implementation. The practitioner takes the blame if something goes wrong. The expert prescriber researches and defines communication problems, develop programmes and take responsibility for improving programmes. This role is passive as practitioners have no say in management on strategic decisions (Hogg & Doolan, 1999).
- **Communication Facilitator:** Here the role of the PR practitioner is act as a communication link between management and stakeholders. The practitioner's duty is to listen to information from both managers and stakeholders of organizations and inform each side about the others' view on an issue. According to Coffie, Balestraus and Sarkodie (2013) the PR practioner under the communication facilitator role acts as communication liaisons who keep two-way communication flow between organizations and their stakeholders.
- **Problem Solving Facilitator:** This role is primarily identified as a communications problem solving role. Here, the practitioner forms part of heads a strategic team constructed to plan and execute strategies to solve communication problems identified in the organization.
- **Corporate Communication Technician:** Here, the PR practitioner is responsible for carrying out communication strategies that execute policies implemented by top

management members. The practitioner does not necessarily form part of top management but is responsible for “generating communication products that implement the policy decisions” made by management members (Coffie, Balestraus, & Sarkodie, 2013, p. 13). Thus the communication technician’s role is to develop editorial pieces, audiovisual productions and other forms of message media to carry out information to publics.

### **2.3 Functions of Public Relations in Organizations**

Although initial practice of Public Relations constituted a tool for power struggle in America, modern functions of PR has developed into a very different form characterized by use of technology, response to changing socio-political environments and the business and marketing environments. In short as the world changes consistently, the functions of Public Relations have also seen considerable changes (Seitel, 2001; Gqamane, 2010).

In modern practice, the PR practitioner is tasked with a variety of functions that are originally in line with communicating with the publics of the organization with which he works. PR is usually described by referring to certain specialized parts of its functions like media relations, employee relations, lobbying, government relations, investor relations etc. (Cutlip et al., 2000). However the day-to-day activities performed by the Public Relations practitioner according to Cutlip et al (2000) Lubbe and Puth (2002) and Latimore *et al.* (2004) include Researching into situations in order to gather adequate information and intelligence. This involves gathering information about the key stakeholders within a particular issue. Also, the PR practitioner performs the function of a writer, writing and editing of news releases, reports, speeches, feature stories, shareholder reports etc.; media placement and research. Public Relations also plays the management and administration function in organizations; counseling, advising and making

recommendations to top management. Another critical function PR plays in organizations is planning and coordinating of special events; preparing and delivering of speeches. Furthermore, Cutlip et al (2000) Lubbe and Puth (2002) and Latimore *et al.* (2004) aver that training and coaching of executives and colleagues on how to deal with the media, making public appearances and speech assignment are key functions performed by PR personnel in organizations.

Public Relations also performs the function of liaison between organizations and their various publics. The core interest of PR in organization is to serve as the link between the organization and the media, community and other external and internal publics (Cutlip et al., 2000; Lattimore et al., 2004).

Other functions of the PR personnel in organizations include speaking on behalf of the organization or arranging for other people to speak on behalf of the organization and also producing multimedia messages that are efficient in communicating with the organization's publics.

## **2.4 Crisis**

The term crisis carries many definitions and meanings. However, “these meanings guide the crisis managers and leaders in deciding what to do in a crisis situation. It is an interesting applied area as well since we talk about “managing” a crisis when actually each crisis situation is very unique by itself” (Zamoum & Gorpe, 2018). According to Timothy Coombs (2007, p. 2), a crisis is the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes. This definition is a synthesis of various perspectives on crisis. A crisis is

unpredictable but not unexpected, wise organizations know that crises will befall them, but they just do not know when. In Simola's (2014) view the disagreement on a singular definition for the concept of crisis management is as result of the many characteristics the concept possesses and its nature. According to Simola, crisis is characterized by rarity, significance, high impact, ambiguity, and urgency and high stakes. In essence, these underlining characteristics are what identify what crisis is. However, Simola acknowledges that what a crisis is to one organization may not be to another due to the mentioned characteristics. In attempting a definition of crisis, Kayes et al. (2013) explain that Crisis involves a period of discontinuity, a situation where the core values of the organization/system are under threat, and this requires critical decision-making. There is a destabilizing effect to the organization and its stakeholders and an escalation of one or more issues, errors or procedures are expected in this period. Their definition emphasizes the weakening effect a crisis can have on an organization. According to their definition, a crisis attacks the core systems of an organization, its operations and most importantly, a single crisis is most likely to be followed by other significant ones that will eventually lead to the collapse of the organization. Similarly, Alexandre (2005b) contends that a crisis being unexpected and uncontrollable hits the core of an organization, disrupting and impeding its operations.

## **2.5 Crisis Management**

Crisis management as a critical organizational function failure can result in serious harm to stakeholders, losses for an organization, or end its very existence (Probst & Raisch, 2005).

Due to the diverse perspectives from which crisis can be defined, explaining crisis management as well can be viewed in diverse perspective. Crisis management can be explained as the process by which an organization deals with a disruptive and unexpected event that threatens to harm

the organization or its stakeholders. Additionally, crisis management can be seen as the management function of strategically positioning an organization such that it is able to tackle unexpected events that may tend to harm the sustainability and development of the organization.

According to Waryjas (1999, p. 1) “crisis management, then, is the task of minimizing the deleterious effects of a serious crisis event using limited resources under extreme time constraints”. Waryjas’ definition centres largely on tackling crisis after they have occurred. Waryjas’ approach to crisis management focuses on the fact that crisis management only minimizes the effects of crisis. Holgren (2015, p. 15) posits that, due to the damaging effects of crisis on organizations, “the purpose of Crisis Management is to avert crises, or if a crisis does occur to effectively manage that event”. The essence of crisis management thus is to ensure that in the event of a crisis, measures are put in place in order to avert the crisis. Waryjas adds that, “the essence of crisis management is cultivating the potential successes lurking among the pitfalls through careful planning, decisive execution, and good luck” (p. 1). This provides that, reduction of the effect of a crisis event, careful planning and decisive execution are critical to the management of organizational crisis. In another words, crisis management is the identification of threats to an organization and its stakeholders, and the methods used by the organization to deal with these threats. Positive interactions and information about the organization build favourable reputations while unpleasant interaction and negative information lead to unfavourable reputations.

Much like Holgren and Waryjas’ approach to explaining crisis management, in Coombs’ (2007) book; *‘Ongoing Crisis Communication’*, he defines crisis management as a set of factors designed to combat crisis and to lessen the actual damage inflicted. He continues to emphasize that the core essence of crisis management is to lessen the negative impact of a crisis and thereby

protect the organization, stakeholders and the industry from harm. Coombs however, further posit that, crisis management is a set of four interrelated factors. They include the following.

- **Prevention:** Otherwise known as mitigation, Coombs in his book avers that this represents the steps taken to avoid crisis. Here, crisis managers often detect warning signs and then effective actions designed to prevent the occurrence of the crisis.
- **Preparation:** This factor is considered the best for crisis management by Coombs because it involves the development and implementation of a crisis management plan (CMP). He argues that, every organization in a bid to curb the effect of a crisis should have crisis management plan, even before the crisis hits. He further argues that, preparation also involves diagnosing crisis vulnerabilities, selecting and training a crisis management team and spokespersons, creating a crisis portfolio and refining communication systems of the organization to cater for crisis situations.
- **Response:** This is the application of the crisis preparedness or management plan to the crisis. Coombs advises that, “The crisis preparation components must be tested regularly. The testing involves simulated crisis and drills that determine the fitness of the crisis management plan” (p.6). An essential aspect of *Response* is recovery. Recovery is simply when the organization tries to reorient itself back into the routine operations it was used to before the crisis.
- **Revision:** This is the fourth crisis factor according to Coombs. It involves an evaluation of the organization’s response to a crisis (whether simulated or real). The organization has to evaluate its activities and plans and identify what they did right wrong during the crisis. The organization use the insight obtained to revise their crisis management plan, train their crisis management team and orient its publics (both internal and external) in

how to manage the crisis better should it happen again. The insight is also geared at preventive that form of crisis from happening again completely.

Crisis management therefore is a strategic and well planned set of efforts that an organization employs in order to prevent the occurrence of a crisis or mitigate the negative implications the crisis might have on the organization's operations. As Coombs (2007) puts it, crisis management is key to reputation management as well. The reputation of an organization hinges heavily on the organization's ability to manage crisis situations effectively. The inability of the organization to prevent or manage crisis situations leads to a serious reputation distortion. In the word of Coombs (2007, p. 8), "a crisis poses a threat to reputational assets. As greater emphasis is placed on reputation, a corresponding emphasis must be placed on crisis management as a means of protecting reputational assets.

The crisis management team (CMT) is a cross-functional group of people in the organization who have been designated to handle any crisis and is a core element of crisis preparation. Crisis team selection is not as simple as finding the people best qualified to work on the CMT. Selection is complicated by the need to have specific functional areas within the organization represented on the CMT. The dominant selection criterion in the crisis management writings is the functional approach. The composition of the crisis team should reflect the nature of the crisis (Weddle, 2001).

Public relations practitioners are an integral part of crisis management teams. As Mani (2008) describes, Crisis Management is the process by which organizational leaders plan, handle, and mitigate the effects of a crisis. Crisis management consists of different aspects including methods used to respond to both the reality and perception of crisis; establishing metrics to

define what scenarios constitute a crisis and should consequently; trigger the necessary response mechanisms; communication that occurs within the response phase of emergency-management scenarios (ibid).

## **2.6 Review of Related Empirical Studies**

A lot of literature have been written on how Public Relations is practiced within the public sector. Reaching a consensus as to how PR is practiced in government organizations differ greatly. This is mostly because the government organizations differ from each other in structure, human power, legislation etc. Most of these studies pay attention to the knowledge levels of PR practitioners concerning their professions. Gezihagne (2018) while studying government institutions in Ethiopia focused his paper on identifying the knowledge levels of PR practitioners in the PR units of public institutions. He found that most workers under the PR unit of the government institutions he studied had ample knowledge on the practice. It however unclear if this is always the case. Some scholars have identified that some members of PR units of government institutions do not have basic knowledge on the practice. Putra (2009) for instance notes that most PR practitioners in government organizations may not necessarily have PR education backgrounds. He found that some PR practitioners may come from other academic and professional background and even come into the job by chance. Thus these practitioners may not always know the basic things about PR practice.

The role of PR in government organizations are not extremely different from what is observed in private institutions. The distinction lies largely in the fact that the role of PR in private and business corporations are closely knit with marketing while public PR is solely public communication (Pocovnicu, 2014). PR roles in the public organizations is thus a tool for public communication within public sphere with core reverence to public interest (ibid).

The role of PR in public organizations are thus geared towards the promotion of government policies (Thomas J. C., 1995). Anyijuka (2016) accounts that PR's core within government institutions is to launch campaigns, lobbying, engaging in propagandist communication on behalf of the central government, corporate social responsibility campaigns, policy promotion, crisis and issues management and managing adverse publicity are critical roles that Public Relations practitioners play in government agencies. Pocovnicu (2014) notes that regardless of the form that PR roles in public institutions come, its core mandate is firstly act as a two-way communication facilitator between the organization and the citizenry. Secondly, the role of the PR department in a public service organization is to serve simply as a tool for public service, putting the interests of the public into its decision making processes.

## **2.7 Theoretical Review**

### **2.7.1 The 3-Phase Model Approach to Crises Management**

Within the scope of model development or framework development for the management of crisis, the more familiar frameworks and perhaps the more relevant, have emerged in the 1990s. Most of these modular frameworks have followed a either a three stage (Richardson, 1994), four stage (Myers, 1993; Fink, 1996) and five stage (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993) approach with the former being more prominent in literature in recent times. Indeed all approaches envisage crisis as not an event but a life cycle phenomenon that has a beginning and an end, as well as a possible rebirth. Thus all the approaches factored a cyclical format to crisis management. For the purpose of this paper however, the 3 stage approach will be used as theoretical underpinning.

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

- **Pre-crisis Stage:** Smith posits that the pre-crisis stage of crisis management largely concerns what he terms the crisis of management. According to Smith the crisis of management regards actions of organizational leaders, organizational culture etc. that does not place premium on preparedness. This lack of organizational preparedness leads to a climate where all that is needed is a trigger event that sparks a crisis situation in the organization. Thus, the pre-crisis stage according to Smith's argument stems from a lack of preparedness from organizational leaders. Richardson (1994) argues that the precrisis stage covers activities drawn to prevent threats that can stir up crisis situations. More recent writers describes the pre-crisis stage no different from pre-2000s writers note. Boudreaux (2005) for instance account that the pre-crisis stage includes all aspects of crisis prevention. This includes issues management, planning and other other proactive measures.
- **Crisis Stage:** The crisis stage is also known as the operational crisis stage. This stage is where the crisis develops into reality and becomes operational (Smith, 1990). According to Andrianopolous (2015, p. 5) "When avoidance efforts fail and a crisis is triggered, the organization goes into "crisis mode" and enters the response phase, characterized by short decision time, complexity, and ambiguity, since risk of immediate damage is still

present". This stage is characterized by organizational activities designed to ensure supportive climates among the stakeholders involved in the crisis situation. Once the crisis strike, therefore, the organization switches its efforts into building organizational mechanisms designed to survive the operations of the affected stakeholders of the organization. Boudreaux (2005) expands that the organization involves itself in activities that regard crisis recognition, distribution of information and messages to communicate about the crisis, reputation management etc.

- **Post Crisis Stage:** The final stage of the approach – post-crisis stage, begins when activities designed to mitigate and communicate the crisis have yielded results and the organization is recovering. This stage is characterised by ensuring the end of the crisis, assuring publics and stakeholders of the security of the organization and essentially, learning from the crisis event (Boudreaux, 2005). Richard (1994) avers that one of the most critical activities to undertake during the post-crisis stage of crisis management is restoring stakeholder confidence in the organization. He posits that crisis events have a high tendency of disrupting stakeholder confidence, loyalty and appeal. Thus, after the crisis has declined, efforts must be taken to restore the possibly lost trust, loyalty and confidence lost. Coombs (2011) on the other hand argues that this stage is a purely recovery stage and recovery for organizations here happen in two core forms. The internal recovery and the external recovery are very essential. Coombs presents that, internal recovery essentially, has to do with learning from the crisis event internally while external recovery involves handling the event externally. Thus, while internal recovery means learning from the event and re-strategizing organizational objectives

and operations, external recovery involves implementing strategies to keep the organization in business.

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

Zamoum and Gorpe (2018) argue that, the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) has deep linkage with the theory and practice of Public Relations. Many Public Relations researches who have concentrated on crisis and issues management have regarded the situational crisis communication theory. The SCCT is attributed to the efforts of W. Timothy Coombs, a professor of communication studies in the University of Eastern Illinois. Coombs initially presented the theory in his 1995 article ‘Choosing the Right Words: The development of guidelines for the selection of the “appropriate” crisis response strategies’. However, the theory did not assume the name ‘Situational Crisis Communication Theory’ (SCCT) until 2002 (Coombs and Holladay, 2002). Prior to the change of name, the theory was commonly referred to as “the Symbolic Approach to Crisis Management and Communication” (Coombs 1995, p. 447; 1998, p. 177). Weiner (1986) and Coombs (2007b) posit that, the SCCT has roots in the Attribution theory. The theory of Attribution regards how people make sense of events. When a crisis event occurs people try to make sense out of it by determining the why the event occurred and more importantly, they try to attribute the crisis to someone or some organization. The core assumption of the Attribution theory is that, in the event of a crisis, people; most likely the publics of the organization try to determining the responsible cause of the crisis (Wise, 2004 and Coombs 2010).

Built on the Attribution theory, the SCCT argues that organizations should strategically, tackle crisis based on knowledge of how the publics attribute responsibility of a crisis event. Thus if the publics perceive a crisis event to be more intentional, then they attribute the crisis to the organization but if they perceive it as unintentional, then, the lesser they attribute the crisis responsibility to the organization (Coombs, 2010).

Furthermore, SCCT consists of three essential elements that are core to the theory. They include: (1) the crisis situation, (2) crisis response strategies, and (3) a system for matching the crisis situations and crisis response strategies (Coombs 2006c, p. 243). The theory essentially builds a link between the crisis situation and the crisis response strategies by building a system that matches the crisis situation and the crisis response strategies. Kyhn (2008, p. 23) explains that “by understanding the crisis situation, a crisis manager can choose the most appropriate response. SCCT is an attempt to understand, to explain, and to provide prescriptive actions for crisis communication”.

Like many other theories, the SCCT has received considerable refinement over the years. In 2007, the composition of the key elements of the theory were refined and have been the mast of most researches done in connection with the theory (Kyhn, 2008). The proceeding parts of this section tackles the refined key elements of the theory.

- **Crisis Situation:** Coombs (2007b) argues that here the crisis manager is concerned with determining type of the crisis. The determination of the crisis type is done in the perspective of the publics but not in the perspective of the organization. Hence the crisis manger here must consider how the media and stakeholders are defining the crisis and even most importantly how the media is carrying the crisis to the public. After reviewing the types of crisis many times through the refinery stage of the theory, in 2002, Coombs

identified three distinct clusters of the types of crisis situation. They include (1) the victim cluster, (2) the accidental cluster, (3) and the preventable cluster. The clusters are in a sequence that reflects an increasing amount of crisis responsibility and reputational damage (Coombs and Holladay 2002: 179-180). Coombs identifies that the 'victim cluster' regards crisis that occur through no fault of the organization. They are usually external to the operations of the organization but have an effect on the firm. They usually include natural disasters, product tampering, untrue rumors about the organizations and situations where employees attack each other at work. Additionally, they produce the strongest feelings of sympathy from the organization's publics. 'Accidental cluster' crisis are crisis that arise when stakeholders complain that the organization is operating in an inappropriate manner. It also involves a technological or technical failure that causes an accident to the industry or a technological failure that causes an accident a failure in product quality hence the product gets recalled by the firm. Coombs and Halladay (2002) explain that this cluster is unintended by the organization. Meanwhile, the *Preventive Cluster* of crisis are mostly intentional and hence produces high level of crisis attribution to the organization. They are largely concerns both human and organizational errors that cause industrial and product or service accidents or failures. Coombs and Halladay present that *preventive cluster crisis* pose serious reputational threats to organizations and are very difficult to manage.

- **Crisis Response Strategies:** According to Coombs (1995), crisis response strategies encompass messages designed to repair the image of an organization. Coombs provide five (5) basic strategies with which an organization can respond to a crisis. They include non-existence strategies, distance strategies, ingratiation strategies, mortification

strategies and suffering strategies. The non-existence strategies seek to eliminate the crisis, with the objective of showing that there is no link between the fictitious crisis and the organization. The non-existence strategy uses a couple of tactics to delineate the organization from the crisis. Denial is the simple statement that nothing happened, while clarification also attempts to explain why there is no crisis. The organization can also use the Attack strategy. This simply implies confronting those who wrongly report that a crisis exists, and intimidation involves threats to use organizational power against some actor such as lawsuits and physical violence (Coombs 1995). The distance strategies acknowledge the crisis and serve to create public acceptance of the crisis while weakening the linkage between the crisis and the organization. Excuse tries to minimize organizational responsibility for the crisis by denying intent and/or volition. Justification seeks to minimize the damage associated with the crisis. The organization attempts to convince publics that the situation is not that bad, perhaps by stating that the crisis is not as bad as similar crises. Justification tactics include denying the seriousness of an injury, claiming that the victim deserved what happened, and claiming that the crisis event has been misrepresented (Coombs 1995, p. 451). The ingratiation strategies seek to gain public approval by connecting the organization to things positively valued by publics. Bolstering reminds publics of existing positive aspects of the organization. Transcendence tries to place the crisis in a larger, more desirable context. Moreover, praising others is used to win approval of the target of the praise (Coombs 1995, p. 452). The mortification strategies attempt to win forgiveness of the publics and to create acceptance for the crisis. Remediation willingly offers some form of compensation or help to victims. Repentance involves asking for forgiveness and apologizing for the

crisis. Rectification involves taking action to prevent a recurrence of the crisis in the future (Coombs 1995). The suffering strategy tries to win sympathy from publics by portraying the organization as an unfair victim of some malicious, outside entity (Coombs 1995).

It is important to also add that an organization needs to talk the same message to all of its stakeholders, in order to transmit Coherence, credibility and ethic. If one of these points is broken, the whole community can make corporate identity is the reality and uniqueness of an organization, which is integrally related to its external and internal image and reputation through corporate communication (Gray and Balmer, 1998).

## **2.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter focused on review concepts related to the paper. Thus, this chapter explained what PR is, as well as what crisis is. This chapter looked critically at the roles and functions of Public Relations in organizations and further reviewed some related studies that have focused on the roles and functions of PR in managing crisis in government organizations. Also, this chapter reviewed the three-stage crisis management model and the situational crisis communication theory as theoretic frameworks underpinning this paper.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the methodology of this paper. The paper is primarily a desk research and hence employed secondary data to achieve its objectives. The paper therefore assessed and

reviewed literature regarding crisis, crisis management, the roles and functions of Public Relations and crisis management in government organization.

### **3.1 Secondary Research / Desk Research**

The paper employed the use of secondary data to assess the role of Public Relations in managing crisis in government organizations. The paper assessed literature concerning the roles and functions of PR and PR's role in aiding government organizations manage crisis situations. Secondary data are data that have already been collected by other researchers. They include government publications, websites, books, journal articles, records etc. Secondary data gathering and usage do not implore the researcher to do field work in order to gather fresh or primary data (Ajayi, 2017). In desk research, the researcher does not collect field data. Instead, the research makes use of existing empirical statistics and other documents that are relevant to the phenomena under study to evaluate his or her research objectives.

### **3.2 Secondary Data Sources**

Secondary data regards data from exiting documents, journals, statistics etc. The paper employed the use of secondary data sources to assess the role of Public Relations in managing crisis in government organizations. The study made use of available data from empirical studies that have been conducted on crisis management in corporate and government organizations. The paper employed a literature review technique to review data available in journal articles, documents, research thesis and dissertations to understand how government organizations apply the roles and functions of PR in managing crisis situations. The assessed data were reviewed in line with the 3 stage crisis management approach.

The secondary data were accessed from diverse online literature hubs. The accessed e-journal articles, thesis, documents, e-books etc. were downloaded and reviewed in line with the objectives of this paper.

### **3.3 Chapter Summary**

This chapter focused on discussing the desk research approach employed to achieve the objectives of this paper. This chapter of the paper focused on the appropriate data gathering approach the researcher employed in this paper.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter is focuses on exploring the objectives of this paper. This section presents the findings of the study. The findings are presented in line with the research questions of this paper.

#### **4.1 RQ1: What is the role of Public Relations in managing crisis within government organizations during the pre-crisis phase?**

The pre-crisis phase of crisis management is characterized by activities designed to prepare the organization of crisis or to institutionalize preventive measures that address threats that can potentially develop into crisis situations (Smith, 1990; Coombs, 1999b). The core of activities to be done during this stage is mainly that of preparedness towards crisis situations or re-strategizing organizational operations to completely avoid a particular crisis. Efforts of PR practitioners therefore must be geared towards understanding threats that may lead to crisis situations and developing communication strategies that minimize the effects of threats on organizational operations. The role of PR therefore, as the anchor of organizational communication within crisis management, largely concerns prevention and threat mitigation measures. The role of PR in managing crisis in the pre-crisis phase includes the following

##### **4.1.1 Research**

Research is a critical function of Public Relations that is deeply embedded within the expert prescriber role. The role of the public relations practitioner is to search for critical information analyse the information and prescribe means of tackling issues based on the accrued

information (Cutlip et al., 2000; Lubbe & Puth, 2002; Latimore et al.,2004). According to Vukajlovic et al. (2019) information is a critical aspect of crisis management. Similarly, gathering information through research is a critical step towards crisis resolution. The PR practitioner in the pre-crisis stage where the crisis situation has not erupted but is in its pre-mature formative stage must engage in rigorous research. In Waryjas (1999) and Holgren (2015) they identify crisis prevention as essential in managing organizational crisis. Within this scope of preventing crisis situations from occurring, they aver that, the PR practitioner is tasked with identifying all critical areas of organizational threat that may morph into crisis situations.

Coombs (2000) and Coombs (2001) maintain that it is essential for PR practitioners to research into core areas of threat such as stakeholders, top management, operations and organizational reputation. Through research the PR practitioner is able to gather adequate information and judge such areas of potential risks that can develop into crisis.

It is worth noting that, since the focus of PR is primarily concerned with communication within organizations, the task of the PR practitioner during the pre-crisis phase of crisis management is to investigate potential threats to communication in organizations (Hogg & Doolan, 1999). Cutlip et al., (2000) posits that research on communication strategies within organizations must regard both communication with internal and external audiences.

Research therefore plays a central role in the activities of a PR practitioner in a public institution, especially when mitigating crisis situations. It is imperative that in managing crisis in government insititutions, the PR practitioner researches effectively, to gather critical information concerning key stakeholders, organizational threats that may morph into crisis,

organizational communication strategies etc. in order to be well placed to play the role of expert prescriber in the face of a crisis.

#### **4.1.2 Planning**

According to Cutlip et al (2000) Lubbe and Puth (2002) and Latimore et al. (2004) one essential role of public relations is planning and coordination. PR is thus in charge of planning and coordinating all issues relating to communication both internally and with the organization's external publics. The planning role of PR is particularly crucial in managing crisis in government organizations as it coordinates all individual aspects of the pre-crisis stage into a complete unit viable for addressing crisis situations. In Coombs' (2007) view, managing crisis is a strategic function, hence all PR activities related to addressing or resolving the crisis should be strategically planned and well executed.

Moreover, the planning role of PR in managing crisis augers that steps are taken to ensre the organization is well prepared for crisis situations. To this effect, scholars advance that two critical things are done – development of a crisis management plan (Coombs, 2007) and crisis management team (Weddle, 2001). Coombs (2007) argues that the crisis management plan is well planned and strategically developed document that instructs the PR department and indeed the entire organization on the core things to do in the event of a crisis breakout. He further argues that, preparation also involves diagnosing crisis vulnerabilities, selecting and training a crisis management team and spokespersons, creating a crisis portfolio and refining communication systems of the organization to cater for crisis situations. Crisis Management Teams on the other hand as noted by Weddle (2001) is a team of cross functional professionals who are tasked with the core purpose of mitigating crisis situations or developing strategies to prevent the occurrence of crisis in the first place.

Pollard and Hotho (2006) posit that the more an organization, especial a non-profit organization (governments and NGOs) are prepared for crisis situations, the better it will be able to handle such crisis. As a result they call for adequate planning to ensure total readiness for any crisis situation.

To buttress the relevance of planning in crisis management in government organizations, a study by Ghazi (2018) on 5 star hotels in the tourism sector of Egypt underscores that there is a positive relationship between stretegic planning and crisis containment within the Egyptian tourism industry. Furthermore, Al-Khrabsheh (2018) found while studying government organizations in Jordanian regions that strategic planning is critical to ensuring crisis prevention and crisis response.

Conclusively, the role of PR which is to plan strategically is of high essence in the management of crisis in government organizations.

#### **4.2 RQ2: What is the role of Public Relations in managing crisis within government organizations during the crisis phase?**

The crisis phase of the three-model approach is where the crisis becomes operational. Here the organization is hit with the crisis situation and begins to experience the ramifications of the crisis situation. During this phase the Public Relations roles are directed at responding to the crisis and its effects on the organization. In this phase Public Relations play a number of roles in mitigating crisis in this stage.

#### **4.2.1 Reputation Management/Repair**

The dominance of reputation management within the practice of PR and in crisis management is found easily in both practice and academia. Most researchers as well as practitioners pay particular attention to reputation management as an integral aspect of crisis management (Kim & Sung, 2013). This is mostly because the reputation of an organization is often most affected during a crisis situation (Effiong, 2014). Gotztas et al., (2008) contend that although the reputation of an organization is not a physical asset, it is one of the critical assets that come under attack due to its fragile nature. Hence it is essential that during crisis, PR practitioners who are tasked with reputation management and repair pay attention to it.

Samson (2018) found in his study of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation that, Public Relations personnel in government institutions pivotal in managing the reputations of government institutions. He found that during crisis situations, PR practitioners in the government institution launch campaigns as part of activities to salvage the reputation of the organization.

According to Gotztas, et al., (2008) the leading concern of many communication related activities within an organization during a crisis is to ensure audiences are reminded of the positive image of the organization. This according to them is done by inciting empathy and interest from the audiences through consistent and holistic behaviour. They aver that the top priority of PR when managing the reputation of an organization during a crisis event is to persuade target audiences in favour of the organization. Communication policies, structures and media messages must therefore seek to persuade target audiences while inciting sympathy instead of outrage. In crisis situations, information flow is of high currency. Therefore, the PR practitioner especially within a government institution must ensure that information flow to

both external and internal audiences are well developed, accurate and represent the positive image the organization is seeking to sell to its publics.

Public image and reputation, especially within the scope of governance and politics is an essential of core concern for most public institutions, workers and politicians. This is even more so because of elections associated with public offices (Rein, Kotler, & Stoller, 1987). Managing reputation as a PR role during crisis is thus a major issue. Nugaraite (1999) as cited in Orzekauskas and Smaiziene (2007) avers that the crux of activities implemented by the PR practitioner in managing the reputation of public organizations is deeply seethed within creating positive publicity and trustworthiness between the organization and its publics. This role is even more essential during the times of crisis situations. The PR practitioner in managing the reputation of public organizations must ensure that communication strategies developed in line with reputation repair are ones that cultivate trustworthiness and create positive publicity to the organization's publics.

#### **4.2.2 Media Relations and Engagements**

Etta (2017) explains media relations as a critical role in the concept of public relations. He avers that the success of all media related activities with an organization relies heavily on media relations as the media is the ultimate source of information to the organizations target publics as well as extended publics. The media is a major channel through which investors, suppliers, retailers and consumers receive information about the core operations of an organization (Argneti, 2003). The media can escalate situations during a crisis and inversely, serve as a crucial catalyst in calming situations during a crisis. The role of the media in crisis management is thus, two-edged; serving both as a positive factor and a negative factor (Ghassabi & Zare-Farashbandi, 2015). Similarly, during crisis outbreak in public organizations, the media acts

both positively and negatively. It is therefore essential to manage media output in order to regulate the quality and quantity of information concerning the crisis that is churned into public discourse.

#### **4.2.3 Internal Crisis Communication**

Taylor (2010) opines that at the core managing crisis for the best results is engaging in effective internal crisis communication strategies. Taylor posits that it is critical to understand internal communication dynamics of organization as it is important as understanding external communication. According to Barret (2002) internal crisis communication can be the success or failure of major crisis management schemes implemented by PR professionals. Internal crisis communication is particularly aimed at internal audiences of organizations who are the first and often most crucial stakeholders of organizations. When an organization enters the operational crisis phase, the information need among its internal stakeholders (co-workers, top management, and other staff) increases drastically (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). The quality and quantity of information flow goes a long way to affect how the crisis situation is addressed. The overall set of activities under internal crisis communication during a crisis is ultimately aimed at affecting the levels of trust and involvement of employees and other relevant internal publics of the organization (Thomas, Zolin, & Hartman, 2009; Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2014). It is thus, the responsibility of the PR practitioner to manage information flow between internal staff members of organizations during crisis situations. In practice, this can be done by sharing of organizational memos, e-mails and other forms of message transmission in the organization to help keep internal publics well abreast of communication strategies and plans of the organization towards crisis resolution.

### **4.3 RQ3: What is the role of Public Relations in managing crisis within government organizations during the post-crisis phase?**

The post-crisis phase of the three-stage model is the last stage. Often, the crisis has capsized in this stage and the organization is beginning to recover to normalcy. According to Boudreaux, (2005) the crux of organizational activities during the post-crisis stage is to assure crucial stakeholders of the security of the organization and ultimately learn from events of the crisis. The post-crisis stage is therefore a stage to learn and in some cases unlearn certain cultures within the organization. PR's role within this phase is often not as enormous as it is in the first two stages. Public Relations activities within this stage are focused on revising communication strategies, communication channels, etc. that contributed to the crisis.

Furthermore, this stage presents the PR practitioner an opportunity to revise the Crisis Management Plan and Crisis Management Team institutionalized during the pre-crisis and crisis stages. The PR practitioner must reconsider certain aspects of the CMT and CMP that were not beneficial to the course of mitigating the crisis and advice management on appropriate steps to take.

It is imperative to note that, during this stage, PR performs one of its most critical functions i.e. training. Lubbe and Puth (2002) and Latimore et al. (2004) advance that the PR practitioner takes charge of training coworkers on revised communication strategies, messages and techniques so as to prepare them adequately for external engagements when seeing out the crisis completely. Training is also essential as it aids in keeping coworkers, who are the core internal stakeholders abreast of revised crisis management plans developed in line with lessons learnt from the past crisis.

#### **4.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the study. The paper aimed to explore the role of Public Relations in managing crisis situations in government organizations. This chapter looked at the role of PR in the various stages of the 3-stage crisis management approach. Thus, the chapter presented findings on role of PR in managing crisis during the pre-crisis stage, crisis and post-crisis stage of the crisis management model.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter of the paper offers a summary to the entire research. The chapter thus summarizes the entire study while emphasizing the core roles and functions of PR in managing crisis situations in government organizations. Also, the researcher proposes some recommendations for both industry practice and further research

#### **5.1 Summary and Conclusions**

Managing crisis within organizations is critical to ensuring organizational sustainability and development. Crisis situations have the tendency of affecting the core operations of an organization and also, have adverse effects on the reputation and image of the organization. This is even more so because crisis situations are very difficult to predict and plan for. From economic crisis, to reputation, operational, human resource management, to natural disasters, crises have the core potential of disrupting the organizational operations and corporate objectives of organizations. It is therefore essential that attention is paid to effective management within organizations.

This paper has argued that despite the worth of attention that has been paid to crisis management within the corporate world, it is of equal importance to focus attention on crisis management in the public sector as well. Most literature have focused on the role Public Relations plays in managing crisis situations in private organizations. The crux of this paper's argument is that while this line of studies is beneficial to understanding the concepts of PR, crisis and crisis

management, there is the need to investigate the PR-crisis management nexus within the public sector scope. This is because the public sector even affects larger groups of publics than private organization do.

In advancing such studies in relation PR's roles in managing crisis situations in government organizations or the public sector, it is imperative that the studies are done in connection with crisis management frameworks that are deep seethed in empirical studies and scholarship. The paper has argued that the three-stage/phase approach to crisis management which comprises the pre-crisis; crisis; and post-crisis phases is one of the most apt theoretical frameworks that underpin studies related to the Public Relations-crisis management nexus. Furthermore it is argued that the three stage approach is holistic generalized approach upon which all other variations (i.e. the four-stage approach, five-stage approach etc.) are developed. The paper argues that in understanding the role of PR in crisis management, it is essential to do this using the 3-stage approach as framework. The core objective of this paper, therefore, is to understand the role of Public Relations in managing crisis in government organization with critical focus on what PR roles and functions can be adopted during each of the three stages to help mitigate crisis situations.

The paper argues that at each of the three stages of crisis management, PR plays certain core roles that regard, ultimately, communication strategies and activities of government organizations. During the pre-crisis stage, PR's role in mitigating crisis situations is mainly that of research and planning aimed at managing risk factors that have the potential of developing into crisis. The role of PR under the pre-crisis stage hence is to identify and plan means that are generally bordered by communication and information flow (either internally or externally) to avoid threats or address risks that could develop into crisis situations.

The crisis stage is where the crisis becomes operational. Some scholars identify this stage as the crisis response stage because the entirety of activities that the PR practitioner engages in is geared towards responding to the crisis event/situation. PR's role here sums up leadership activities that regard containing the effects of the crisis. The paper argues that reputation management and media relations and engagements are the core of PR activities when crisis finally hits the public sector. The PR practitioner is concerned with protecting the image and reputation of the organization in the eyes of its publics. Also, they are concerned with managing the quality and quantity of information concerning the organization and the crisis within the media space as the media has the power to escalate or diminish crisis situations in the minds of the publics.

Events after the crisis has been mitigated are less rigorous and demanding on the role of public relations. PR activities during the post-crisis stage of crisis management are not that daunting. However, they are highly essential in ensuring that the crisis is completely resolved and the organization is sparked back into its full operations. PR's role during this stage is to re-assess communication channels, strategies and culture of the organization both internally and externally. PR's role is to examine crisis management plans and crisis management teams and understand which strategies were crucial to the crisis resolution process and which proved counter-productive. PR is also concerned with training coworkers and top management officials on revised strategies on tackling impending threats that could morph into crisis situations.

Conclusively, PR has a central role in managing crisis situations in government organizations. Since PR is essentially the communications management unit of organizations, its roles in mitigating crisis situations hinge greatly on managing information flow between the organization and its publics (both internal and external). The roles span all three stages of crisis

management and are crucial to ensuring threats, risks, crisis events and post-crisis related issues, that bother especially on organizational communication, are well addressed in order for effective crisis mitigation.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

The findings of this study indicate that PR has critical roles and functions to play in government organizations during crisis periods. The findings indicate that the role of Public Relations span all three stages of crisis (pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis stages). Based on the findings of this paper the researcher suggests the following recommnedations.

### **5.2.1 Recommendations to Practice and Industry**

1. Government organizations must endeavor to make Public Relations a part of management in order for the roles and functions of PR during crisis management to be better realized and performed
2. Public Relations departments of government institutions that do not have crisis management teams must endeavor to establish such teams that are preferably headed by experienced Public Relations personnel.
3. The paper further suggests that PR government organizations that do not have well researched crisis management plans must develop and implement such documents to help mitigate crisis situations when they occur

### **5.2.2 Recommendations for Further Research**

1. Further researches should employ the qualitative approach to study government organizations particularly in Ghana to situate studies of such kind in real life practice of Public Relations and Crisis Management
2. Also, other researchers can study the role of Public Relations in managing crisis situations in government organizations within a broader perspective and not just within the scope of the three stage approach as this study has done.
3. The researcher recommends that other studies expand their focus to other corporate institutions and not just government institutions as this study focused on.

### **5.4 Chapter Summary**

This section of the paper offered summary and conclusion to the entire paper. This chapter further presented recommendations to both industry practice of Public Relations and crisis management as well as to further research.

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