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Professional Perspectives on the Use of a Crisis Communication Plan

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Abstract:

A standout amongst the most significant concerns for PR practitioners is the need to have a crisis communication plan. It is crucial for a company to preserve its image and reputation, and a PR practitioner plays vital role in accomplishing this goal but this cannot be accomplished if PR professionals do not have a tool to handle crisis. A crisis communication goes beyond just communicating with the publics but it helps in protecting the image and reputation of the affected organization. This paper seeks to find out how PR practitioners engage a crisis communication plan during a crisis and how necessary it is to always have a plan. To achieve this, survey research design was adopted with the use of questionnaire as instrument for data collection. These copies of questionnaires were distributed to five PR agencies in Lagos state and were strictly filled by PR practitioners. This was to enable the researcher achieve the main purpose for the research which is getting the views of PR practitioners in using a crisis communication plan. The findings show that although PR practitioners handle crisis, they do not have a plan ready to tackle crisis. They rather wait for crisis to first happen before they come up with a plan. Another major finding is that these PR practitioners after implementing a plan, do not evaluate if the plan was successful or not.

Keywords: *Public relations, crisis communication, public relations experts, public relations activities, crisis communication plan*

1. Introduction

The manner by which organizations speak with stakeholders during a crisis event is quickly changing with the 24-hour provided by the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Most times, Public relations practitioners and other communication officials battle to make messages and keep up control when a crisis occurs. As Schiller (2007) clarifies, in "times of crisis, while corporate communication administrators are planning manicured articulations, clients are at the same time blogging, messaging and posting photographs out of fury and distress on the grounds that the very individuals who ought to listen them aren't". An organization working in the abusive business must know about the way that it is especially defenseless against outer and interior issues. In this way, it must take activities and utilize instruments that will positively affect as well as protect image security (Tworzydło, Szuba, 2019).

Turney (2008) points out that times of crisis can be turned into opportunity for strengthening and growing a company if they are managed well, saying that "Effective crisis communication can actually enhance an organization's reputation". Jennex (2004) characterizes emergencies and catastrophes as surprising conditions or circumstances that request a quick and viable reaction that is "not quite the same as their typical working methods". Despite the fact that in any crisis, PR is continually hoping to deal with the prompt responses, keeping up a more extended term viewpoint that spotlights on expanding continuous communications with focused populaces is acceptable practice, and adds to a superior in general result. Latonero and Shklovski (2011) examined the significance of fast reactions during emergencies, and they concurred that "the general objective of hazard and crisis communication is to advise the public regarding potential or recent developments and to convince the public to adjust their conduct in manners that would improve wellbeing and security". Public relations practitioners help other people build up and keep up viable relationships with outsiders. This work is generally performed through a public relations firm or an office, autonomous specialists, or as a piece of the communication staffs of companies, not-revenue driven associations, or government offices (Latimore, Baskin, Heiman, Toth and Van, 2004).

1.1. Research Objectives

- To determine the role of PR experts in handling crisis
- To determine how a communication plan is engaged by PR experts during crisis
- To determine the effect of the crisis communication plan engaged by PR experts

1.2. Research Questions

- What role does PR professionals play in handling crisis?
- How do PR practitioners employ the use of a crisis communication plan?
- What is the effect of the crisis communication plan engaged by PR experts?

2. Statement of Problem

During crises, organizational reputations are at stake and this reputation could either be managed or damaged. Stakeholders are also likely to increase the pressure on the stricken organization through various media (Meer et al. 2017). Numerous organizations make positive suspicions about their partners possibly to discover that they are incorrect when a crisis happens and it is very tragic that these associations neglect to utilize the administrations of public relations specialists because of absence of trust or carelessness in their capacity to determine the crisis.

Generally, building a reputation takes time and reputation not well managed can lead to crisis which is the reason David and Chiciudean (2013), opines that organizations seek to use crisis communication plan as the main instrument to manage stakeholder perceptions and, thus, preserve or defend their reputation. It is no doubt that PR experts engage in various strategies to resolve crises but it necessary to understand how crisis is being communicated in Nigeria agreeing with Baker and Nelson (2005) who says that in most crises event, it is likely that an organization does not have all of the necessary capabilities to effectively respond. Hence, this study seeks to expose how most PR professionals resolve crisis through a communication plan. By so doing, we are able to find out the essence and importance of having a communication plan in an organization.

3. Literature Review

Crisis communication can be characterized extensively as the collection, preparing, and scattering of data required to address a crisis circumstance. In pre-crisis, crisis communication rotates around gathering data about crisis dangers, settling on choices about how to oversee potential emergencies, and preparing individuals who will be associated with the crisis the board procedure. The preparation incorporates crisis colleagues, crisis spokespersons, and any people who will help with the reaction. Crisis communication incorporates the assortment and preparing of data for crisis group basic leadership alongside the creation and spread of crisis messages to individuals outside of the group the conventional meaning of crisis communication. Post-crisis involves dissecting the crisis management effort, communicating necessary changes to individuals, and providing follow-up crisis messages as needed. Crisis communication has focused on the crisis category/crisis response – what organizations say and do after a crisis. Crisis responses are highly visible to stakeholders and very important to the effectiveness of the crisis management effort. For instance, improper crisis responses make the situation worse. It is by considering the breadth of crisis management that we will stretch the boundaries of what is studied in crisis communication

According to Kathleen Fearn-Banks (2011), Crisis communication is the dialogue organizations establish with the publics before, during or after a negative occurrence. This dialogue specifies the methodologies and guidelines that could limit the harms. Henceforth, crisis communication looks at how associations are relied upon to genuinely educate partners, publics and even workers previously, during, and after a surprising event that could affect the association's reputation. Information is significant at whatever point there is a potential or genuine event that can upset the structure and mind of an organization. Fishman (1999) states that a crisis communication situation involves a set of relationships with various stakeholders within a constantly changing environment and necessitates effective communication for maintaining these relationships. With the end goal of this study, crisis communication won't be viewed as a receptive component upon the event of a crisis, however as a necessary capacity all through the crisis the board procedure. On the side of this perspective, Grunig et al (2002) express that "communication with potential publics is required before choices are settled on by vital decision makers, when publics have formed but not created issues or crises, and during issue and crisis stages ". This is additionally avowed by Fearn-Banks (2007) who expresses that crisis communication is the cooperation between an organization and its stakeholders before, during and after a crisis. Note that crisis communication with the media is just a single component of the crisis communication procedure, and it is likewise critical to take note of that the entire crisis communication process must be proficient so as to deliver powerful communication with the media. The idea 'media' "all things considered alludes to the press, radio, TV and film". With the end goal of this study, the emphasis will be on the various media concentrating on current newsworthy information. The reason for selecting the news media as focal point is based on the argument that effective relationships and communication with the news media is one of the most fundamental areas of the crisis management process (Barton 1990; Seitel 2007).

Communication researchers offer a few unique meanings of a crisis. One definition distinguishes a crisis as a typically low-likelihood event that might be unanticipated and has an "endlessly negative effect on the association" (Crandall, Parnell and Spillan, 2019). In an approach that implies that crisis isn't just a risk yet in addition a possibility for an organization to develop, Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2011) described a crisis as "a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty" and that allows the organization to face both threats and opportunities in relation to its highest priority goals. Pratt (2012), after surveying two decades of crisis

definitions, concluded that a crisis “is a situation or event that can be organizationally unnerving, disruptive, or interruptive”. Though crises can and often do lead to harm, the realization of harm is not a necessary feature of crises. Instead, a crisis is an event that is often (but not always) unexpected, that is often determined by the perspectives of stakeholders, and can prove to be a series of events that can disrupt (for better or worse) the status quo of the organization. As public relations scholars have pointed out, an often unacknowledged, yet essential, element woven into the fabric of both public relations and crisis is the ability to identify and analyze the relevant, and sometimes complex, ethical components of a situation (Bowen, 2008; Ihlen, 2010).

In the area of crisis communication, there is term is very vital and that is the word called “Stealing thunder”. This is an idea that crisis communication experts have imported from law. In law, lawyers take thunder by recognizing a defect in their own case before their resistance expresses the shortcoming (Williams, Bourgeois and Croyle, 1993). In a crisis, inquire about reliably shows that a crisis does less reputational harm if the organization is the first to report the crisis. The same exact crisis does less damage when the organization first reports it than when the news media or another source is the first to report the crisis (Arpan & Pompper, 2003; Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012). Stealing thunder involves timing including the revelation of information about a crisis. As professionals note, stealing thunder is nonsensical. Managers think it is better not to uncover a potential crisis since you don't reveal negative information on the off chance that you don't need to on the grounds that there is an opportunity that others may never find out about the issue if the organization doesn't report it but the salient truth is not detailing a crisis is hazardous. At the point when organizations don't reveal issues they know exists, it makes the impression that they don't care about the security of their stakeholders. Stealing thunder shows the estimation of crisis communication timing for reputation. An intriguing investigation looked at the impact of timing, stealing thunder and crisis reaction. The examination needed to figure out which of the two elements strongly affected organizational reputation or if the two could be joined to build the reputational protection value of crisis communication. The outcomes found that if the association took thunder, the kind of crisis reaction had no impact on reputation. It appeared that stealing thunder gave all the reputational assurance the organization could pick up from crisis communication. However, when there was no stealing thunder, the recommended crisis response strategies were better at protecting reputations than the non-recommended crisis response strategies (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012). The study shows just how powerful stealing thunder is as a crisis communication resource. The investigation shows exactly how ground-breaking stealing thunder is as a crisis communication asset.

One intriguing however provisional line of crisis communication related to stealing thunder examines a channel effect for social media. A channel effect is when individuals respond distinctively to a similar message when it is conveyed through various channels. The channel itself is appeared to modify how individuals saw and respond to messages. A few scientists have contended that web-based life can have a channel impact for crisis communication (Schultz, Utz and Goritz, 2011; Utz, Schultz and Gloka, 2013). The channel studies do reinforce the value of organizations using social media as part of the mix of channels used to deliver a crisis response.

3.1. Communicating Crisis to Stakeholders by PR Experts

Recent research trends in the field of crisis communication has shown that time has come to move beyond the nearsightedness focus on external communication to the media and organizations immediate problems, to other areas which include different stakeholders (Kent, 2010). More specifically, crisis does not happen as an isolated event, rather how and why they happen, as well as how they are managed is closely related to internal communication processes (Heide and Simonsson, 2015; Taylor, 2010). Internal communication is a pedal that helps to prevent crises, create positive reactions, minimizes damage and eventually produces positive results (Mazzei and Ravazzani, 2013; Mazzei et al., 2012). Previously, internal communication has not been viewed as a factor causing a crisis rather it is seen as a source of influencing employee than a source of engaging them in conversation for the attainment of understanding between management and employee (Kukule, 2013). In addition, it can be argued that scholars have basically neglect the notion that lack of internal crisis communication can stir up organizational crisis.

From a general point of view, Frandsen and Johansen (2011), explain that for all intents and purposes internal crisis communication is viewed as sender-oriented concentrating on how managers speak with workers in crisis event. Moreover, prior examinations on internal crisis communication for the most part focus on the mental parts of internal stakeholders. Specifically, the investigation of Karl E. Weicks theory of retrospective sense-making concentrating on how organizational stakeholders comprehend and bode well about a crisis circumstance (Weick, 1988) has contributed immensely to the study of organizational internal dimension of crisis management, and crisis communication. Internal crisis communication involves strong need for sense making (Maitlis and Sonenshain, 2010).

Over the past ten years, a rapidly growing body of crisis management research has emerged that focuses on what organizations say and do after a crisis hits, the use of a crisis communication plan. The focus of this research is on the use of communication to protect the organization's reputation during a crisis (Coombs, 2006). Similarly, as various stakeholders' numerous impressions of an organization structure a corporate reputation (Cornelissen 2006), a crisis will affect multiple groups of stakeholders (Shrivastava and Mitroff, 1987). Lee claims that Coombs' categorization of crisis types overlooks the possible variations of attributions that may occur within a particular crisis. An audience could vary in their opinion that a company is accountable for a particular crisis. This suggests that future studies would have enhanced validity if they included the analysis of stakeholders' opinions expressed in newspapers or the Internet (Lee 2004). Coombs does not devote much attention to this central issue of differentiated stakeholder attributions in the research, but treats stakeholders as if they were one big homogeneous group. During a crisis, consistent communication becomes the organization's priority. One member of the crisis response team should be assigned the duty of a PR expert, with another

selected as a backup. Depending on the exact nature of the crisis, the team should determine how much detail is appropriate for different stakeholder groups to know, from board members to staff, volunteers, media, clients, or funders. (Weiner (2006) gives 10 rules that organizations should find useful during a crisis:

- Respect the job of the media. The media are not your organization's foe; in actuality, they are a resource for conveying your key messages to your publics so its best that you don't stay away from them. As a PR expert, you ought to plan an explanation that has built up realities; clarify what the association is doing and give foundation insights.
- Communicate, impart, convey. That is the primary principle of crisis communication. Conveying early will set an inappropriate or right tone for the period spent by the crisis. Anticipate that the media's inquiries should be the 5Ws and 1H. Be straight to the point, accurate and candid.
- Take responsible. One major question many people influenced by the crisis would need addressed is why? The public and partners need somebody to assume liability for the crisis; sympathize with the influenced and even apologize publicly, for the unfolded events. Being responsible isn't assuming the fault, no, it implies expressing how the association correcting the circumstance.
- Centralize Information. The association should spread the information it gets and has, to the board. These could incorporate information from, analyst remarks, the media and even manager's reports.
- Establish a crisis group. As prior expressed, the crisis group is framed and prepared before a crisis strikes, and a circumstance room set up. At the point when a crisis happens, everybody goes about as prepared and the group ought to have the option to get to the most elevated management levels.
- Plan for the most exceedingly awful; trust in the best. Assume the most terrible that could occur and get ready for it with the vital techniques of activity.
- Communicate with workers. The employees should comprehend what an organization is doing to contain a crisis since they are the organization's bleeding edge "ministers" in a crisis.
- Third gatherings. Utilize third parties to talk for your benefit. Third parties go about as character observers and regularly convey more validity than the organization at the focal point of a crisis.
- Use research to decide reactions. It is essential that you investigate the assessment of public sentiment and statistical surveying to get understanding to the size of a crisis and how the public deals with concealed issues about it. Screen the online platform, visit rooms and sites.
- Create a site: If the circumstance grants, you can make a site with which you offer modern information about the crisis and get your organization story in the public

At the point when the residue has settled and the crisis is going under control, it is the association's obligation to recapture the clients' trust by evaluating the effect the crisis had on the brand and the notoriety of the association. It ought to consider a wide scope of communication systems to reestablish the trust and loyalty of its customers. The PR expert gathers public relations tools such as media management, internal communications and leadership ingenuities to create proper corporate social responsibility programs. The company can also engage opinion polls or surveys that establish any attitudes that customers may have towards the organization, months after the crisis has happened.

3.2. Significance of Communicating Crisis

Practitioners in public relations departments are privy to the popular adage that posits that „in the absence of information, misinformation becomes news. “ It is therefore, the responsibility of the public relations practitioners to collect and disseminate information about the crisis to the media putting in to consideration the five W's and H that is, what happened? Who did it happen to? When? Where? Why? And How? These false impressions, emerge from failure of the organization to readily offer quick and timely information during a crisis episode, culminating in damage to the brand name of any institution and thus causing anxiety among its employees and lead to quitting and colossal losses to the organization (Marra, 1998). 25 A crisis communication plan is a guide to information that should be easily available when a crisis occurs. This therefore helps in containing a crisis in the shortest time possible. The crisis management team is at the same time able to disseminate information to its stakeholders within a short time. Authors Bernstein (1986), Barton (1993), and Fearn-Banks (1996) describe crisis communication techniques at length. They posit that these plans assist institutions in information sharing on time thus by providing proper guidance on what is expected to lessen the damage caused. Marra (1998) further asserts that communication is more often than not considered a secondary less important than „managing“ the crisis.

In many organizations, the corporate communication or public relations departments are one and the same with media relations. These departments are charged with the role of creating awareness and or information dissemination. A crisis management plan provides guidance during a crisis. It provides information about the overall spokesperson, provides indicators of what needs to be executed during a crisis, who the contact persons are and basically provides ways and means of documenting the crisis response. Lerbinger (2012), Coombs (2015), and Low, Chung and Pang (2012) have noted how a crisis communication plan is a time saver in the event of a crisis; how it outlines roles and responsibilities during a crisis episode. It assumes that the crisis management team has a crisis management plan in existence. Previously, researchers and practitioners have primarily investigated plans and strategies employed during a crisis. Anthonissen (2008) asserts that crisis communication and information sharing are rudimentary in crisis management in institutions as well as harnessing of good relationships with employees. The essence of a crisis communication plan is to outline guiding principles and processes that the institution will embrace in communicating with its stakeholders. Through

implementation of its communication policy, the institution will realize its dream by providing its stakeholders with messages of ownership.

Ultimately, crisis communication enables an organization to have a delicate landing when confronted with a crisis as it gives a guide that aids in placing without hesitation actions that will help ease the effect of a crisis (UoNCP 2014). An organization must be in a situation to immediately act, with exactness and speed during a crisis during the different crisis stages. The various target audiences must be reached with the relevant messages specific to them so the organization's image will not genuinely be corrupted when decisions are made. The assumption is that communication modes (such as emails, memos and or circulars) send vital information to everyone who needs to know and that everyone will receive this information, hence, most organizations don't see the need to intensively communicate crisis to their stakeholders. As indicated by the University of Nairobi (UoNCP, 2014) it is conceivable in any case, that information doesn't contact individuals who don't utilize a portion of those techniques for communication, (for example, email). Be that as it may, one thing is obvious; an all-around structured communication strategy would control the arrangement and fruitful execution of a crisis communication plan. It is significant that the PR professional know the target audience it means to connect with during a crisis. There are divergent audiences that will expect information during the crisis and whose need for the information is varied. Therefore, what needs to be done is identify the specific audiences, establish their need and decide who in the team of experts is best suited to disseminate the information required. Coherence and consistency in information dissemination is critical. Different managers could at times give varied, conflicting messages on important issues which can lead to confusion and even mistrust amongst employees. Another challenge that could arise is the flow of information not reaching the desired publics when it is required. The management of crisis communication in both private and public organizations has thus not been without challenge. It is therefore, evident that, ineffective crisis communication is a critical management challenge that faces many institutions of higher learning. Another factor that has contributed to increased crisis in communication is the bureaucracy and red-tape that government run institutions have to contend with. It is of essence, that the crisis communication team in any institution be aware of the communication flow in the event of crisis.

Crisis communication, as indicated by Moden.K. (2008), is the information data that is traded by and between public professionals, organizations, the media, influenced people before, during and after a crisis. Successful communication during a crisis requires a decent capacity to impart previously, during and after the crisis. Communication is indispensable in an association and when a crisis happens, the specialty of conveying ought to be painstakingly taken a gander at, to maintain a strategic distance from misguidance or miscommunication, particularly from the media and the public. Moden.K. (2008) says that imparting amidst a crisis is more troublesome than in regular conversation. With the correct frameworks and strategies, your organization can keep a tight grasp on communications just if the correct skill, methods and jobs are set up before the event. Communication requires coordination, collaboration and a lot of internal communication. Everybody in the organization ought to have incredible communication abilities to accomplish organizational objectives and goals. This will limit the plausibility of the crisis from happening.

3.3. Theoretical Framework

Coombs (2007), states that SCCT projects people's reactions to the response strategy that is rolled out in order to manage the crisis. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Coombs (2007), in its center, is built upon the Attribution theory according to which, people search for the cause and effect of an event. They deduce their role in an event and are faced with feelings either of anxiety, sadness or even joy depending on the outcome of the crisis. Whilst communicating with the public, it is important to read their body language. Whatever the reaction, it will inform the researcher as to how effective they are in communication; as well as form the basis through which the public will react during a crisis to counter the effects. Since this study will explore the effective role a crisis communication plan plays during crisis it will seek to establish how and why it is important during a crisis. Even if there exists a good crisis communication plan in the organization; it must be rolled out, and the public must be aware about its existence and informed and as a result they need to know what strategies, channels or platforms are in place and how they can be used in the event of a crisis.

4. Methodology

For the purpose of this research, the survey research method of data collection was used. Survey is the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions (Check & Schutt, 2012). This type of research allows you to use different methods to recruit participants, collect data and utilize various method of information. E.g. survey research can make use of either quantitative (using questionnaires with numerically rated items), qualitative (using open ended questions) research strategies or using both strategies. The method of data collection used under the survey method is the questionnaire and interview.

The questionnaires were self-administered to the population size by the researcher. Also, public relations practitioners of the selected agencies to help researcher obtain more in-depth information on the topic of discuss.

5. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size for this study is 100. The respondents were drawn from five public relations agencies in Lagos state, Nigeria namely Brooks and Blake, Red Media, Media Reach, Sesema Agency and Media Seal. These agencies were chosen because they are listed amongst the top five PR inclined agencies in Lagos. The sampling techniques used for the selection is the stratified sampling method. The agencies chosen are respectively based on their relevance and level of

prominence in the state using the stratified sampling also. The public relations practitioners of the above-mentioned agencies were administered the questionnaires.

6. Result

6.1. Background Information on Respondents

Options		Percent
	Male	55.00%
	Female	45.00%
	Total	100.00%

Table 1: What Is Your Gender?

Source: Field Survey (2020)

Across the five PR agencies surveyed, 1 points out that more males than females were exposed to the copies of questionnaire, that is, 55.0% and 45.0% respectively. Although the difference between the pair is 10%, however, the result indicates that more males work in a PR agency

Options		Percent
	18-25	8.00%
	26- 31	33.00%
	32- 35	25.00%
	36-41	19.00%
	42 and above	19.00%
	Total	100.00%

Table 2: What Is Your Age Range?

Source: Field Survey (2020)

Table 4.2 indicates that the largest percentage of the respondents were within the age range of 26 and 31. Further observation points out that more than a third (25.0%) of the practitioners were between ages 32 and 35 years. 19.0% had their ages ranging from 36 and above. It could be inferred that the reason why 33.0% of the respondents had their ages from 26 to 31 is as a result of the young minds that coming into the PR industry.

Options		Percent
	Employee	47.00%
	Employer	36.00%
	Retired	17.00%
	Total	100.00%

Table 3: What Is Your Marital Status?

Source: Field Survey (2020)

Table 3 indicates that the highest number of that work in a PR agency are married, that 40.0%, five percent out of the 40.0% are single with 7% and 11% that are both widowed, divorced and separated.

Options		Percent
	Married	40.0%
	Single	35.0%
	Divorced	11.0%
	Widowed	7.0%
	Separated	7.0%
	Total	100.0%

Table 4: What Is Your Occupation?

Source: Field Survey (2020)

The table shows that the PR agencies in Lagos State is still evolving with 47.0% who are employees and 36.0% that are employers. From the table we can also see retirees with 17.0% which indicates that most PR agency give opportunity to students to be part of the industry where they majorly come in as Interns and 8.0% after several years of practice, retire.

Options		Percent
	Graduate	57.0%
	Postgraduate	43.0%
	Total	100.0%

Table 5: What is your Education Level?

Source: Field Survey (2020)

Table 5 shows that education qualification goes a long way to affect PR relations practice. The table shows that our major respondents are graduates that 57.0% while 43.0% are postgraduate. In correlation to Table 3, we can boldly say that majority of the employees in a PR firm either have a graduate or a postgraduate certificate.

6.2. Practitioners Role in Crisis Communication

This section explains the role and action most PR practitioners take in handling crisis

Options		Percent
	Yes	42.0%
	No	40.0%
	Not Sure	18.0%
	Total	100.0%

Table 6: Do You Handle Crisis in Your Agency

Source: Field Survey (2020)

Table 6 seek to find out the possibility of a PR agency to handle a crisis. From the table we can see 42.0% of the respondents that says they do handle crisis. Hence, we can deduce from this table that it is impossible for a PR agency not to handle a crisis. Although 40.0% of the respondents say no, it also shows that most agencies either employ a consultant in the area of crisis rather that handle it themselves.

Options		Percent
	Everyday	27.0%
	Few days in a week	24.0%
	Few days in a month	38.0%
	Once in a year	11.0%
	Total	100.0%

Table 7: How Often Agencies Role-Play Crisis Scenarios

Source: Field Survey (2020)

The table above shows that majority of PR experts handle crisis few days in a week. This shows the rate at how crisis stir up in an organization and we can relate it to that saying that crisis is indeed "unexpected happenings". To buttress this, 27.0% of the respondents also says that they handle crisis every day. In a week, we have 24.0% of our respondents handling crisis. This just exposes the nature of crisis occurrence.

Options		Percent
	Yes	25.00%
	No	48.00%
	Not Sure	27.00%
	Total	100.00%

Table 8: There Is a Formal or Official Crisis

Communication Plan

Seeking to find out of PR agencies have crisis communication plan always ready to battle, 48.0% of the respondents who are the majority says no. 25.0% say they have and 27% say they are not sure. From this table we can say that not all PR agency are ready to tackle crisis when it comes.

Options	Percent
Financial crisis	11.0%
Personnel crisis	18.0%
Organizational crisis	19.0%
Technological crisis	17.0%
Natural crisis	8.0%
None of the above	7.0%
All of the above	20.0%
Total	100.0

Table 9: Crisis Addressed in Agency's Communication Plan
Source: Field Survey (2020)

This table shows us the various crisis that most likely occur in an organization and are given to PR experts to handle. Hence, from the Table, we see that majority of the respondents with 20.0% says that all these crises are addressed in their crisis communication plan. 19% agree that they just address organizational crisis, in the aspect of finance, 11% says they handle financial crisis. Personnel crisis is addressed in only 18.0% of the PR expert's plan. Minority of the respondents says they don't address any of these crises. This means that PR experts handle every crisis that most likely to occur.

Options	Percent
Yes	47.0%
No	32.0%
Not Sure	21.0%
Total	100.0%

Table 10: Adequately Prepared to Handle Crisis
Source: Field Survey (2020)

From the table, it shows that many of the respondents with 47.0% are always adequately prepared to handle crisis as it comes. 32.0% of the respondents honestly agreed that they are not prepared and 21% says they are not sure if they prepared.

6.3. How PR Practitioners Engage the Use of a Crisis Communication Plan

Table 11 to 14 in the questionnaire seek to find out how the PR practitioners employ the use of a crisis communication plan.

Options	Percent
Yes	37.0%
No	48.0%
Not Sure	15.0%
Total	100.0%

Table 11: Can Only One Media Platform Be Engaged During Crisis
Source: Field Survey (2020)

The table above shows us that 48% of the PR practitioners in the selected agencies say it is possible for a crisis to be tackled with just one media platform. Some think it is possible that 37% of the respondents and 15% say they are not sure.

Options	Percent
Print Media	10.0%
Online Media	26.0%
Social Media	21.0%
Electronic Media	8.0%
All of the above	35.0%
Total	100.0%

Table 12: Most Preferred Media Platform for Dissemination of Message during a Crisis
Source: Field Survey (2020)

Crisis Communication is paramount in very organization and based on this table, we can say that the PR practitioners do a good job in communicating crisis with 35% which is the majority of the respondents saying all the aforementioned media platforms are preferred, 26% believe that online media do a good job in communicating, 21% says the social media platform is more preferable while 8% say electronic media is better.

	Options	Percent
	News Letters	8.0%
	Speaking opportunities	8.0%
	Sponsorships	15.0%
	Social media	9.0%
	Press release	8.0%
	Events	4.0%
	Press conferences	8.0%
	None of the above	9.0%
	All of the above	31.0%
	Total	100.0

Table 13: Most Appropriate PR Tools to Use during Crisis
Source: Field Survey (2020)

To find out the most appropriate PR tools to use during crisis, 15% of the respondents agreed that a sponsorship is effective to use. 8% says speaking opportunities, newsletters, press releases and press conferences are better but still not make an impact. The majority of the respondents with 31% says it is important to use of the tools, 9% says social media is more appropriate and still 9% says none is appropriate while 4% is events is manageable. But from the table we can that all tools are very necessary to be used.

	Options	Percent
	Yes	36.0%
	No	48.0%
	Not Sure	16.0%
	Total	100.0%

Table 14: Are Separate Crisis Communication Plans for an Individual or Similar Plan
Source: Field Survey (2020)

From the table, it shows that many of the respondents with 48.0% says no, 36% says yes, they do have and 16% claim not to know. In relation to Table 8, while the majority says they don't have plan ready, here, the majority also says they don't have a separate plan for different organization or individuals.

6.4. Effect of the Communication Plan

Questions 13, 14 to 22 in the questionnaire determined to identify the perception of the public to the public relations activities carried out in the various institutions.

	Options	Percent
	Yes	36.0%
	No	38.0%
	Not Sure	26.0%
	Total	100.0%

Table 15: Plans Have Been Implemented
Source: Field Survey (2020)

Out of 100 respondents, 38% says their plans have been implemented, 36% says no their plans have not been implemented while 26% says it might have been implemented or not and they are not sure. Here, we can say that not all crisis communication plans are always implemented by PR practitioners.

Options		Percent
	1-5times	7.0%
	6-11 times	32.0%
	12-17times	36.0%
	17 and above	18.0%
	Never	7.0%
	Total	100.0%

Table 16: Number of Times Plans Have Been Executed
Source: Field Survey (2020)

From table 15, out of the respondents that said their plans have been implemented, 36% says it has been executed 12-17times, 32% says 6-11times, 7% says 1-5times and still 7% says their plans have never been executed, 18% claim their plan have been executed 18%.

Options		Percent
	1-5 years	15.0%
	6-10years	41.0%
	10-15 years	28.0%
	15 and above	16.0%
	Total	100.0%

Table 17: Number of Years of Experience
Source: Field Survey (2020)

Amongst the 100 respondents, 16% have the highestnumber of years of experience, 28% says they've had experience from 10-15years, the table also shows 1-5years of experience come from 15% of the respondents, 41% have 6-10years.

Options		Percent
	Yes	36.0%
	No	42.0%
	Not Sure	22.0%
	Total	100.0%

Table 18: Do You Evaluate the Outcome of the Crisis
Communication Plan
Source: Field Survey (2020)

Implementing a crisis communication is not complete until an evaluation is carried out. From the table we can see that 36% says they do evaluate, 42% say they don't and 22% say they are not sure. We can say here that most PR practitioners do not evaluate their plans after execution.

Options		Percent
	Excellent	26.0%
	Above average	33.0%
	Average	23.0%
	Below average	12.0%
	Very poor	6.0%
	Total	100.0%

Table 19: How Would You Rate the Success of the Communication Plan
Source: Field Survey (2020)

When asked to rate the success of the crisis communication plan, 33% rated themselves above average, 26% says excellent, 23% said average, 12% honestly admitted below average and 6% also agreed 6%. This shows the performance of a PR practitioner in executing a crisis communication plan.

6.5. Perception of PR Experts on Crisis Communication

Questions 13, 14 to 22 in the questionnaire determined to identify the perception of the public to the public relations activities carried out in the various institutions.

Options	Percent
Strongly Agree	28.0%
Agree	31.0%
Undecided	20.0%
Disagree	12.0%
Strongly Disagree	9.0%
Total	100.0%

*Table 20: PR Professional Must Have a Crisis Communication Plan
Source: Field Survey (2020)*

Out of 100 respondents 59% agree to the fact that every PR practitioner must have a crisis communication plan in place rather than waiting until crisis occurs before they get one. 21% says they disagree to this and 20% say they don't know if a PR practitioner should have or not. We can deduce from here that most PR practitioner wait for crisis to occur before they carry out a plan.

Options	Percent
Strongly Agree	13.0%
Agree	24.0%
Undecided	31.0%
Disagree	18.0%
Strongly Disagree	14.0%
Total	100.0%

*Table 21: Organization Face Crisis Because They Don't Employ the Services of a PR Expert
Source: Field Survey (2020)*

From the above although 37% of the respondents says every organization can handle crisis themselves without the help of a PR practitioner, still yet, 32% says it's impossible for an organization to handle crisis own their own while 31% are undecided.

Options	Percent
Strongly Agree	13.0%
Agree	30.0%
Undecided	29.0%
Disagree	16.0%
Strongly Disagree	12.0%
Total	100.0%

*Table 22: Communicating Crisis Is Vital to an Organization
Source: Field Survey (2020)*

The table above shows that 28% of the respondents disagree to the point that when an organization is in crisis, they should communicate it to their various stakeholders, 43% refuses to this saying it is vital the organization keep their publics abreast on what is going on. 29% are left confused because they don't know which to do.

Options	Percent
Strongly Agree	16.0%
Agree	28.0%
Undecided	25.0%
Disagree	19.0%
Strongly Disagree	12.0%
Total	100.0%

*Table 23: Crisis Management and Crisis Communication Are the Same
Source: Field Survey (2020)*

Out of 100 respondents, 44% of PR practitioners says crisis management and crisis communication are two sides of the same coin, 31% says they are not while 25% are left undecided. We can say here that PR practitioners see crisis communication as a process of communicating crisis to the publics.

Options	Percent
Strongly Agree	19.0%
Agree	20.0%
Undecided	28.0%
Disagree	21.0%
Strongly Disagree	12.0%
Total	100.0%

Table 24: Not Every PR Practitioners Handle Crisis
Source: Field Survey (2020)

Although 39% respondents from Table 23 agree that some PR practitioners are not experienced to handle crisis 33% claim that they are while 28% are undecided. This shows that not every PR practitioner should be trusted to handle a crisis.

Options	Percent
Strongly Agree	18.0%
Agree	18.0%
Undecided	26.0%
Disagree	25.0%
Strongly Disagree	13.0%
Total	100.0%

Table 25: Some Crisis Is Beyond Managing
Source: Field Survey (2020)

The table above shows that 38% says that crisis can be managed, while some says it can be managed, 36% says it cannot be managed. Hence crisis out of control cannot be handled. 26% are in-between the decision on whether crisis is beyond managing.

Options	Percent
Strongly Agree	27.0%
Agree	21.0%
Undecided	26.0%
Disagree	20.0%
Strongly Disagree	9.0%
Total	100.0%

Table 26: Not All Crisis Communication Plan Turns Out Successful
Source: Field Survey (2020)

Taking a more streamlined approach of questioning the effectiveness of a crisis communication 4.17 reveals that 48% of the respondents agree that not crisis communication plan turn out successful, 29% disagrees that they do turn out successful and 26% are undecided. This shows that even PR practitioners are not 100% correct at all times and they cannot fully save a struggling organization.

Options	Percent
Strongly Agree	20.0%
Agree	32.0%
Undecided	24.0%
Disagree	17.0%
Strongly Disagree	7.0%
Total	100.0%

Table 27: It Is Important to Do a Post-Evaluation
Source: Field Survey (2020)

Doing an evaluation is not enough but it is important a post-evaluation is done after a crisis communication plan is executed. 52% agrees to this, 24% disagrees while 24% are undecided. This shows that although these PR practitioners agree to this point, they still do not do it.

Options	Percent
Strongly Agree	10.0%
Agree	35.0%
Undecided	26.0%
Disagree	20.0%
Strongly Disagree	9.0%
Total	100.0%

Table 28: It Is Necessary to Do a Pre-Evaluation
Source: Field Survey (2020)

While Table 26 emphasis on the need for post-evaluation, this table shows the need to first do a pre-evaluation before executing a plan. While 45% of the respondents do a pre-evaluation, 29% don't consider it necessary while 26% are undecided.

7. Discussion of Findings

The tables above show the findings from the respondents. The tables above were used to analyze and answer the research questions guiding this study so as to know our respondent's opinion about crisis communication and how significant it is to have a crisis communication plan. Therefore, the findings from this study will be discussed based on how it has answered the research questions posed for this study.

7.1. Research Question 1: What Role Does PR Practitioners Play in Handling Crisis?

It is important to know that PR practitioners indeed play a vital role in handling crisis. Table 6 confirms this as it shows that majority of PR practitioners when asked if they handle crisis, said yes. Hence, the role of a PR practitioner cannot be over-emphasized when dealing with crisis. Contributing to this, PR practitioners do not just carry out a crisis communication plan but already have a plan they work with. Their plans do not just address a particular crisis but they also seek to address other crisis that may come up in an organization. But sadly, the result shows that many PR practitioners although see it as a need to have crisis communication plan, they first wait for a crisis to occur before the come up with a plan. Taking cue from Table 8 where most of the respondents said they do not have a formal or official plan. This means that they get a plan ready during the crisis which is not healthy for any organization.

As a PR practitioner, there is a need to be proactive at all times i.e. you are ready when a crisis comes and you are ready even before crisis occurs. By so doing, the organization for which you are representing will be very much feel at ease knowing you have an in-depth knowledge about your job. Therefore, if a PR agency say they are adequately prepared to handle crisis they should also learn the act of proactiveness because crisis occurs when an organization least expects. It saves everyone the drama of running in different directions when crisis hits.

7.2. Research Question 2: How Do PR Practitioners Employ The Use of a Crisis Communication Plan?

Having a crisis communication plan is not enough but using it well everything. The result shows that when a PR practitioner have a crisis communication plan, they exhaust all the media platforms as possible. It is important to know that the media is the bedrock for communication. It is either the media or you are not communicating. The media can either make or mare any organization. One major mistake organizations make is to hide news from the media all because they feel they are protecting their reputation. They do not consider the fact that nothing stays away from the media.

When a crisis occurs, the first thing an organization should do is engage all the media platforms as possible although organizations should determine the kind of news they want to give to the media. True the media should be informed but they don't have to know everything. No media materials or platforms is considered irrelevant as long as they connect to your target audience. This is indeed a very critical consideration. When crisis happens, it is good to first know who have been affected and what media platform can reach these people. (Eriksson & Olsson, 2016) supports this view saying different media platforms have different attributes and sociability functions in times of crisis communication. Hence, each media platforms have a role to play during crisis.

7.3. Research Question 3: What Is the Effect of the Crisis Communication Plan Engaged by PR Practitioners?

From the tables above (Table 11-14), it seeks to determine the effect of a crisis communication plan, there is a need for evaluation. Apparently, majority of respondents do not evaluate their crisis communication plan when it has been executed and it is dangerous. There is a need to do a pre-evaluation and a post-evaluation before and after executing a plan. Assuming a plan met the objectives for which it was meant to is wrong. In the school of public relations there should be no room for assumptions. Also, from the results it is seen that plans are hardly implemented and this is to buttress still on the need for evaluation. A plan when evaluated, can be decided upon if it can be implemented several times or not. This will give room for PR practitioners to have as many plans as possible.

8. Recommendations

With regards to the review of literature and the findings of this study, the following recommendations will be of immense benefit to:

8.1. Organizations

- Organizations must take public relations more seriously than ever before as it tries to fulfil its promises. This is important because to gradually overcome crisis and miscommunication.
- There is a need for organizations to have a PR department. This means Public Relations personnel have to be trained and retrained regularly to achieve successful crisis communication plan.
- Organizations must embrace the need for openness with the PR agency for which they have an account with. There should be transparency so when a crisis occurs, the PR personnel is not shocked at what they have to handle. When it comes to crisis, there is no time for surprises and organizations need to put this into consideration.
- Organizations must accept that Public Relations is serious business and must strive to avoid crises by funding the Public Relations units of their ministries, departments and agencies so they can carry out researches and evaluations.
- Organizations must seek the advice of a PR practitioner before setting out to address a crisis. They need to understand that there are some things that are beyond an organization doing on its own. Hence, to save your reputation, seek help.

8.2. Public Relations Professionals/Officers

- Public Relations professionals must define their roles during crisis and act beyond just communication or information officers.
- Public Relations officers should be research oriented and continually seek for improvement in their skills because Public Relations in the world today needs new-age approaches.
- When addressing crisis, PR practitioners should engage the media that connects to the affected target audience this is because not all media connects to every target audience.
- Public relations professionals should not wait for crisis to happen before they have a plan. It is important to have a crisis communication plan way before a crisis occurs. This is a call for PR professionals to be prepared for crisis at any time.

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