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## **ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH IN THE FIELD OF CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS**

**Abstract.** This article provides an overview of practices in the field of crisis communications. Herein we carry out an overview of the main components of this concept and those studies, which were conducted in this area since the beginning of this concept. The first part of the article is devoted to the analysis of the wide range of definitions of the concept "crisis communication" and its components. In the second part, the author carries out an overview of the practices, that were made towards the study of crisis communications. The third part of the research draws attention to the study of related concepts connected with crisis communications. At the bottom of the article the author analyses development stages of crisis communications. The article focuses on the study of all components of crisis communications` response. All stages of struggle with crisis (pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis phases) are emphasized and described herein. The conclusions are drawn and future research prospects are outlined.

**Keywords:** crisis communications, PR crisis, risk management, public relations, preventive response, environment analysis, crisis management, problem management.

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**Introduction.** For the last thirty years the interest to organizational crisis induced scientists and practitioners in the field of management and communications to conduct researches in crisis communications.

It may be said, that crisis prevention is targeted at avoiding of negative media attention. It reflects the communicative aspects of the crisis. Arguably, even one hour, lost for nothing during the crisis, comes at a price.

**The aim of the article** is to outline basic researches, that composed a fundamental scientific basis for the development of crisis communications and other related disciplines.

**Literature review and the problem statement.** There is a fairly large amount of crisis definitions [Heath, Millar 2004]. Some rely upon the mistakes, made by the organization. Others focus on management measures, that are outside the framework of common or general processes. Some of them highlight critical condition of the situation and tension, others – improper control, uncertainty, violation of law or ethics, and other abuses.

One of the hottest topics in the crisis is: the issue of responsibility, willingness and ability of the organization to protect its reputation. Here we can include the legal aspect of the company activity. It is not enough to say, that the anti-crisis activities should warn target groups about possible risk and approximation of crisis.

Scientist T. Coombs from the College of Communication of the University of Central Florida suggested his position of what the definition of crisis is meant to be. He noted, that the crisis would be visible to people only partially, because

people can see only the top of the iceberg. He said: "The crisis can be seen as the perception of event, which threatens important expectations of participants and can affect the company operation. The crisis is largely related to the perception. If participants believe, that the crisis exists, the organization stays in crisis until it convinces the participants, that the organization is out of it. The crisis does not live up to expectations; the organization did something, that members consider inappropriate" [Coombs 2009, p. 100].

But this definition does not fully reflect the situation in the state of informational or hybrid war, which sees strong long-lasting systemic crisis and is targeted both at internal and external audiences.

In the course of scientific work, a lot of researches on how the organization should communicate during the crisis, that have occurred. Some scientists claim, that most crisis researches are focused on the crisis in a particular organization, but not on how the crisis affects the public [Waymer, Heath 2007].

A lot of studies are devoted to management during the crisis. A research related to the harassment in the Roman Catholic Church is rather indicative [Boys 2009].

This study also analyses the anti-crisis rhetoric of the US Catholic Church, the victims of sexual harassments and the opinion of the religious people.

Some scientists try to segment the anti-crisis planning into three stages (pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis) and thus carry out researches, associated with each segment [Coombs 2009]. On this issue T. Coombs says the following: "The way we understand these stages as discrete, but interrelated events (points of analysis), and the way we understand what each stage requires (both prevention, and response), it may improve the theory and practice in the field of crisis communications " [Coombs 2009].

When conducting the review of the researches on crisis communications, it is important to identify the key terms of the crisis in order to clearly understand the limits of research. The main terms are: crisis, crisis management and crisis communications. These three definitions are inextricably linked with each other and must be considered in the progression from crisis to crisis management and crisis communications.

To operate these concepts, we need to determine, what each of them means. There are many definitions of term "crisis".

For example, some scientists argue that it is "the most important phenomenon with potentially negative result, that affects the organizations, companies or industry, and also the publicity, product, service or reputation. It makes it impossible for the organization to carry on its business and presents a threat to its existence" [Bergman 1994]. Another definition says: "It is not necessarily a bad thing. This can be a radical change in benefits, both for the better or for the worse" [Friedman 2002, p 5].

Referring to the third definition, we can say: "It is an event, that can potentially influence the entire organization. So, if something affects only a small, isolated part of the organization, it could not be a serious crisis. Before the serious crisis occurs, it should become a heavy burden to human life, their property, financial income, reputation, and to the general condition of organization`s well-being" [Mitroff, Anagnos 2001, pp 34-25]. Also, it can be mentioned, that "these are the crucial moments in the life of the organization" [Regester 1989]. It is far from the complete list of definitions of crisis.

Crisis management can be defined as "a set of factors, targeted to combat crises and to reduce the actual losses caused" [Coombs 2007, p 5]. In addition, one of the main functions of crisis management is to prevent or to reduce the negative effects of the crisis, to protect the organization from destruction [Coombs 1999, p 4].

Crisis management is a multi-aspect process, which includes preventive measures, plans for crisis resolution and post-crisis evaluation. A host of factors, which compose the crisis management, can be divided into three stages: pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis. Pre-crisis category includes actions to prevent crisis and preparation for crisis management. Crisis response is a feedback to the crisis, which takes place. Post-crisis is an activity, which analyses the causes of the crisis and the process of crisis flow [Coombs 2007].

Crisis communications can be defined as the collection, processing and distribution of information necessary to solve the crisis. The function of crisis communications in the pre-crisis period is to collect information on the crisis risks, to take decisions on how to manage potential crises, and to train people who will participate in the anti-crisis measures. Training includes members of the crisis team, crisis representatives and any other person, who will assist in crisis overcoming.

Crisis communications include the collection and processing of information for team decision-making, along with the creation and distribution of critical messages to people outside the team. Post-crisis period provides analysis of crisis management efforts, negotiating the necessary changes for individuals, as well as providing critical messages as needed. Crisis communications are focused on the crisis and the response to crisis and also on post-crisis activity of the organization. The crisis response is very important element, both in the company and in society, which is in the midst of the crisis in general. For instance, irregular crisis measures make the situation even worse.

Crisis communications are one of the most important elements of effective crisis management. However, any discussion of crisis communications must begin with consideration of the origins of crisis management in more comprehensive context for crisis communications.

**Research results** In 1986, S. Fink, a scientist from Boston College of Communications, published his work, entitled "Planning of the inevitable" [Fink 1986]. All crisis management aspects of that time and their related spheres were described in this book for the first time. The author of the book states: "Crisis management did not appear out of thin air. The roots of crisis management derive from emergency situations and liquidation of consequences of natural disasters."

Namely, studying emergency and effective options for liquidation of consequences of natural disasters, we can find the ways to prevent incidents and to respond to crisis. Academic papers in the field of crisis management first appeared in the International Magazine of Emergencies and Natural Disasters. Besides this, strong emphasis on the crisis component was noticed in the protocol of publications of the magazine "Emergencies and Crisis Management." Scientist from the University of California I. Karantelli studied anti-crisis measures during disasters in detail. [Quarantelli 1988] As for the crisis management, S. Fink is considered to be one of the most famous experts ever. He was first of those, who studied crisis, which took place in stages. Fink's model consists of four stages: initial, when worrying signs of the crisis appear; aggravation phase, when the crisis appears; recovery phase, which includes fear

of crisis; and the phase of crisis resolution, when the organization comes back to functioning on a regular basis [Fink 1986]. Fink also proposed the model of crisis development.

Another scientist, Smith, has developed a step by step model of crisis management, which included three steps: crisis management – identifying of crisis; active crisis – initiates the event, then first measures occur; and crisis of legitimization – communicative response is given to the media and government. [Smith 1990] There is also a feedback loop from crisis of legitimization to crisis resolution. Smith begins to move beyond the most critical process, considering the crisis management efforts as well.

Y. Mitroff, a scientist from the University of Southern California suggests a model of five-stage anti-crisis measures: discovery of crisis signs – an attempt to identify the worrying signs and to take preventive measures; monitoring and control – active search and reducing of risk factors; recovery of protective environment – actions targeted at counteraction of the crisis during its occurrence; recovery – efforts, taken to come back to normal operation; and education – people consider the work of crisis management and learn to counter the crisis [Mitroff 1994]. Y. Mitroff believes, that the process of crisis management is more than just managing the crisis. At large, crisis models reflect the management process in emergency: mitigation, readiness, response and recovery [Principles of Emergency Management]. The scientist puts the education into separate stage. The process of crisis management can be organized around three-phase models, introduced earlier: pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis phases. Pre-crisis includes signal detection, prevention and training. Crisis, in particular, includes recognition of event and response to it. Post-crisis phase focuses on actions, taken after the crisis, aimed to return to normal activities [Coombs 2007].

Applied nature of communication crisis is reflected in the development of knowledge body. The first significant study was written by practitioners and appeared in non-academic magazines [Bergman, 1994; Carney, Jorden 1993; Loewendick 1993]. Applied researches tend to use the theory in order to solve real problems. Management studies are focused largely on the crisis management and considered crisis communications as one of the elements of crisis resistance [Marcus, Goodman 1991].

Case studies, analysed by scientists, were the next steps in the evolution of crisis communications. The first example is the use of an apology for crisis communication [Dionisopolous, Vibbert 1988; Ice 1991]. Educational case studies were more severe, as they systematically used special analytical methods and tools. A striking example is the study of V. Benoit, associated with the restoration of images [Benoit 1995]. A large number of published case studies used techniques of image restoration, related to this research [Benoit, Brinson 1994; Benoit, Czerwinski 1997]. Some scientists began to appeal to use analytical methods for the study of crisis [Dawar, Pillutla 2000; 35].

Communication is the essence of crisis management. We consider it necessary to turn our attention to the review of research, related to each phase. It is also necessary to clearly distinguish the difference between two main types of crisis communications: crisis management of knowledge and reaction management of concerned parties [Coombs 2009]. Crisis management of knowledge includes the identification of sources, collection of information, its analysis, sharing and decision-making. Reaction management of concerned

parties includes communication actions, taken to figure out how concerned parties perceive the crisis and everything connected with it.

In the pre-crisis phase, crisis communications focus on searching of risk and its reducing. "Preventive model" of crisis management is one of the most widespread in the field [Olaniran, Williams 2008]. Preventive action is a priority for this model. It is based on vigilance during the pre-crisis phase. In order to assist in decision-making in crisis situations and for their prevention, it is recommended to use pre-crisis messages to prepare concerned parties to the crisis [Wan, Pfau 2004]. Using a biological analogy, the pre-crisis messages provide concerned parties with information about the potential crisis in order to create resistance to backlash and negative publicity. The results of their researches largely repeat the results of previous studies. In other words, formation of reputation is more important and advantageous for organizations even in times of crisis [Dawar, Pillutla 2000].

Some studies divide crisis planning into four stages. The idea is that crisis management becomes more active when combined with problem management. Proactive, symmetrical process has four stages. The first stage deals with problem management with a focus on monitoring. Crisis managers try to find the first signs of the crisis and take measures to resolve the problem. Early detection gives time for analysis and strategy development. The second phase is planning of preventive actions. Crisis managers take measures to prevent the crisis. This phase goes into problems` monitoring. Crisis managers also evaluate the threat, considering it in the terms of losses, that may be caused to the organization.

The third stage is the crisis. At this stage anti-crisis team, including representatives of the press service, operates most actively. The fourth stage is post-crisis stage, when the problem is still monitored by the media, involving other concerned parties. Anti-crisis managers continue to engage with concerned parties and evaluate the efforts of crisis management. This prospect remains in a conceptual stage with a bit of research on this topic. However, there is a huge potential for additional studies of this approach to crisis communications.

The studies of the crisis perception are still challenging nowadays. This in particular concerns the Internet. Here attention was paid to experts in the field of crisis communications and their opinion on how to reduce negative response to the crisis.

Practices, connected to psycholinguistic component, are seem to be very interesting. During the research, it was found that when people hear the phrase "no comment", they begin to think, that the organization is guilty and the executives suppress something. Research on reaction to the transparency of events indicates, that the representative of the organization should arrange a team, which includes experienced speakers and people, who understand the psychology of the crowd. This is to decrease tension during the crisis.

The research related to the psychological responses to crisis events is rather important. Scientists from the University of Tennessee R. Heath and M. Palenchar studied the process of people`s activity after they were informed about the crisis to happen in the near future. They found that the productivity and morale of these people reduced significantly and fear of the crisis appeared instead of cohesion [Heath, Palenchar 2000].

Due to the fact that the existence of the organization depends on the way it responds to the crisis, this phase is the most investigated. The first studies in the field of crisis response were similar to guidelines to crisis response. Scientists and practices put emphasis on the need to respond to the crisis in the first hour.

The introduction of the Internet has reduced this period of time. Concealment allows the opponent to control the flow of information. In addition, studies have shown the value of bad news, coming from the organization. If the organization, but not the media, is a first source of information about the crisis, it influences the reputation to a lesser extent. This effect has been called "to embellish the noise" and is a proof that organizations need to discuss the crisis and not to conceal it.

The bulk of the research in the field of crisis communications is focused on the use of anti-crisis measures. Scientists try to understand how crisis communication can be used to achieve specific results. It is important to remember that different crisis response strategies are used for different purposes. D. Sturgess, a scientist from the University of Texas identifies three strategic foundations: information briefing – how to cope with the crisis physically; correction of information – how to cope with the crisis psychologically; establishing of reputation – attempts to mitigate the damages, inflicted by the crisis to an organization. Obviously, these three interrelated elements effectively influence the process of overcoming of the crisis [Stephens, Malone, Bailey 2005].

Crisis communications were studied from many points of view. For example, scientists from the University of Missouri M. Allen and R. Caillouet investigated the anti-crisis measures of one organization for two years [Allen, Caillouet 1994; Caillouet, Allen 1996]. Other researchers have studied various types of political crisis. Their idea is that the various crises require different anti-crisis measures. In this study, it was found that the type of crisis directly affects the anti-crisis measures [Huang 2006]. The study, conducted using content analysis, on the subject how the executives of the organizations interact with the media during the crisis, appeared to be very interesting [Holladay 2009]. This study was also complemented with other studies, which showed the way the state-financed organizations come out of the crisis [Lerbinger 1997; Ogrizek, Guillery 1999].

In general, a variety of studies in the field of crisis communications is impressive. For example, scientists from the University of Tennessee Stevens and Mellon investigated the role of technical translation in strategic crisis response and speed of response, using this type of activity [Stephens, Malone, Bailey 2005; Sturges 1994]. They mostly studied industrial crises and in some cases, specific terminology was used. They investigated how and in which form this information gets into the media through press releases.

It is also considered, that most researches in the field of crisis communications came to us from western science. We agree with this statement, but we should note, that there are many studies, in the eastern science, which have also made a significant contribution to the creation of crisis communications as a field of knowledge. Scientists from China investigated the features of crisis response in their country and the differences, that exist in approaches to crisis response [Huang, Lin, Su 2005]. Another group of researchers studied the causes, that brought one of the largest Chinese companies into crisis. [Kovoor-Misra, Nathan 2000] The crisis provides an opportunity to evaluate the work of organization, including the reasons for the crisis and the efforts required for crisis management.

**Conclusions.** Crisis communication is a specific area of research in the field of public relations, which continues to grow. It is safe to say that the topic of crisis management has become dominant in studies of public relations. Soon

we will be able to observe a situation, where crisis communication is virtually an independent sector of knowledge and minimally depends on public relations. Crisis communication is inextricably bound up with three other key areas of PR: risk communication, problem management, and reputation management. For this reason, it is very important to study this issue in a single context.

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