

**THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN INSTITUTIONS
OF HIGHER LEARNING IN KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
NAIROBI**

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DECLARATION

This Research Project is my original work and no copies of this work have been submitted in part or whole to any other university for any other award.

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This Research Project has been submitted to the University of Nairobi for examination with my approval as University Supervisor.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research project to my son Alex Nzuki and dear friend Julius Kyambi, for believing in me and for their undying support, encouragement, patience, moral support and sacrifice during this difficult journey; and for having held my hand and walked with me this far. My sincere appreciation and heartfelt gratitude goes to them.

ABSTRACT

The general objective of this study was to explore the role communication plays in effective crisis management within institutions of higher learning. Many public and private institutions and or organizations are usually unprepared in handling the public relations and crisis management aspects of crises. The specific objectives of the study were to determine the role communication plays during the various stages of crisis management; to determine the factors that affect the implementation of effective communication in crisis management and to investigate what challenges affect the implementation of a crisis management plan. The study was guided by the theory of Attribution that draws from people's personal experiences to crisis and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory that states that stake-holders perceptions are drawn from how a crisis is handled and its reputation during a particular crisis episode. The study location was the University of Nairobi. The study population was 150 people, drawn from Central Administration, and the Colleges of Humanities and Social Sciences as well as, that of Architecture and Engineering thus comprising 110 members of staff and 40 students. A survey was carried out whereby the respondents were administered with questionnaires and ten key respondents interviewed for in-depth data. Data analysis and interpretation was done using descriptive and inferential methods for the quantitative analysis and thematic analysis quantitative methods. The findings established that the roles played by communication in crisis management are awareness creation, mobilization and evacuation during crises. It also emerged that the way in which communication is relayed is vital; the way in which the message is designed and the timing in crisis aversion. The study found that there were several challenges faced by both internal and external stakeholders and some of the challenges cited had to do with how crises were communicated to the target audience as well as handled at the various stages of planning, execution and post crisis. The study concludes that it is vital for an institution to be able to anticipate crisis and seek ways of crisis aversion in a timely manner. This can effectively be done by having an established crisis management plan in place as well as a crisis management team. The study thus recommends that the institution needs to formulate guidelines that can be used to assist in crisis mitigation as well establish a good working relationship by working closely with the media in order to avoid media speculation and untruths.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CMP	-	Crisis Management Plan
CCP	-	Crisis Communication Plan
SCCT	-	Situational Crisis Communication Theory
EBK	-	Engineers Board of Kenya
CLE	-	Council of Legal Education
CUE	-	Commission for University Education
UoN	-	University of Nairobi
JKUAT	-	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture & Technology
KU	-	Kenyatta University
MU	-	Moi University
TUK	-	Technical University of Kenya
EU	-	Egerton University
HELB	-	Higher Education Loans Board
UoNCP	-	University of Nairobi Communication Policy
MKU	-	Mount Kenya University
KRC	-	Kenya Railways Corporation
VC	-	Vice-Chancellor
DVC (A&F)	-	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration and Finance)
DVC (AA)	-	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs)
DVC (SA)	-	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Affairs)
VLIR-IUC-UoN	-	Vlaamse Inter-Universitat Raad-Inter University Cooperation- University of Nairobi

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Strategic Communication

Financial times & ft.com/lexicon define communication as strategic when it is in line with an institution's vision, mission and core values and is able to improve the positioning and competitiveness of any institution or organization. This study underscores the critical role of communication through information dissemination as the most effective way of achieving the desired message in the best possible way, using the right channels that are measured against well-considered organizational and communications-specific goals.

Crisis management

Coombs (2007) defines crisis management as a course of action designed to reduce the damage a crisis can cause on any institution as well as its stakeholders. This study lays emphasis on the fact that crisis management is the application of the strategies designed to help the institution deal with a sudden and significant negative event. It protects and defends the university in cases of growing public concerns to its reputation, together with its brand name or its publics or both.

Public Perceptions

Public opinion need not of necessity be incorrect or founded on something other than the fact. Generally, the public can time and again receive an adequate amount of accurate information that could help form a general view about a personality, celebrity or business without necessarily relying on hearsay or speculation. This is the differentiation relating to utter truth founded on details and a fundamental reality shaped by popular opinion, media coverage and/or reputation according to (Durant 2012). Public perception on the other hand according to this study is how the public view a situation and or event based on how it affects them or from what they understand of it.

Mitigate

Cambridge English Dictionary defines mitigate as that which makes (a personality, one's frame of mind, temperament, etc.) easygoing or more gentle; soothe; appease. The researcher's understanding of mitigate is that which is done by an individual to reduce the impact of something, that would ordinarily seem difficult if not impossible to deal with.

Public Relations

According to Flynn et.al, (2008), PR is the calculated organization of relationships between an institution and its varied publics, through use of communication, aimed at achieving a shared understanding, appreciation of organizational goals in order to serve the publics' interest. PR is about repute - the result of your actions, your speech and other people's thoughts about you. PR is that which is done in order to safeguard the image of an organization against would be false innuendos.

Institutions of Higher Learning

An institution of higher learning is an establishment that provides associates, bachelors, masters, and/or doctorate ready degrees to eligible individuals who have gone through the various courses of learning.

Internal communication

Is the exchange of information and messages between staff in the various departments as well as across all divisions and different levels of an institution or organization (UoNCP, 2014). It can also be referred to as communication that is exchanged within an institution leading to effectiveness and efficiency of employees' performance.

External communication

This is information sharing between the institution and its publics, internal and external of its formal structure (UoNCP, 2014).

Publics

This is an audience that is essential to the institution. It comprises clientele - existing and potential; staff; investors; media; administration; suppliers; opinion-shapers.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

In “The Handbook of Crisis Communication”, Coombs (2010) defines crisis as “the outlook of an episode that threatens vital experiences of publics’ and is capable of affecting an institution’s performance. Therefore, a crisis is that which happens when an institution’s reputation is threatened. A reputation is an assessment of an institute created by its publics, who on the other hand are the affected populace or those that can have an effect on an organization (Mitchell et al, 2007). Repute is consequently a valuable asset that is worth protecting. A flawed repute may contribute towards the disappearance of valued customers and this can directly affect the livelihood of the company which would have dire consequences that are a manifestation by the bottom line (Coombs, 2007).

In the recent past, crisis communication management plans as well as strategies have been adopted by both private and public sector organizations, as well as by institutions of higher learning in Kenya. For the last two decades, crisis communication has grown as a field of study (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007), and has been addressed from different scientific domains, making it difficult to oversee the bulk of research that has been conducted. Moreover, research on the effectiveness of communication strategies to restore reputations during crises, is still in its infancy (Hobbs, 1995). This study seeks to evaluate public perception on best practices for crisis preparedness. It will further interrogate in-depth what the laid down strategies put in place are; and how they are employed during crisis management episodes with an aim to mitigate crisis episodes. It will at the same time determine how the institution through its communication

policy has sought to present its stakeholders with well-timed, precise, objectives and absolute information during times of crises (UoNCP, 2014).

Coombs, (1999) posits that there is no organization that can boost immunity to a crisis and that crisis can spring from within its confines or outside the organization. Reynolds, (2006) posits that once this happens, people's lives may be endangered and the standing of a company or institution be exposed. According to Heath (2006) he posits that in order to explain crisis, you must first describe danger. Heath, goes on to state that danger is an occurrence that can have both positive as well as harmful consequences of varying magnitudes, the prevalence and impact of which can be on various occasions anticipated and contained.

Of essence to managing a crisis is tact as well as efficiency in communication. In the absence of these the wellbeing and protection of its publics and the image of an organization are at risk. "The mode of information dissemination in an organization affects public perception both in crisis response as well as mainstream coordination and mitigation" (Stephens & Malone, 2009).

For example, when a crisis situation intensifies and becomes complex thus transforming into a multiple communication type, what kind of public relations approach is employed within an organization and or institution? Lesenciuc, et.al. (2008), documents that this approach has to take into account the area of meaning for the public relations procedures and the vital set of laws used in the event of a crisis. Its approach generally does not limit, neither does it resolve, at organizational level, a certain type of conduct in its workforce, but it in turn provides rules of application so that each member of staff knows his or her function within the organization and, as a result knows which is his/her role, and, thus the final course of action in preparation of crisis

communication will not deteriorate into a confused, uncoordinated action. Lastly, this strategy encompasses each role, such that, each section of the whole organization will be covered.

According to Stavre (2001), a public relations approach, need not imply a firm and complicated strategy, quite the opposite, it is likened to a channel, inside a lively framework of maturity and in the absence of apprehension and its inevitability is aimed at offering precision and effectiveness. The best approach to public relations will always be the first one put into action, whereas, in order to realize this course of action, there is need for preparation in a virtual work-frame, as close as possible to a calculated reality. This arrangement of the public relations policy comprises mainly the intricate part of the whole process of the planned approach of the public relations area.

A well designed strategy therefore, entails the application of hard work, steadily and its main intent must be the realization of the desired results (Stavre, 2001). This calculated approach can be integrated into documents showing the course of action in gradual steps, as well as, in tactical stages, according to the interactive crisis management, and such action requires careful planning or results drawn from a explicit resolution made by the managers.

Gone are the days when companies were only accountable to their own shareholders. Apart from Publics becoming expansive; they too are curious and require to be well informed. A crisis management plan is therefore a vital asset in this fast-changing world. There is no entity that is immune to crisis, but the approach used to tackle the crisis should be tactful. Effective, fast communication will most definitely strengthen a company's image. The public view an

organization or institution by the way in which a crisis is handled. When the wellbeing of stakeholders is placed before those of an institution, the institution or organization is often given a second lease of life. Efficient and effective action is key in dealing with crisis (Anthonissen, 2008).

Crisis management according to Coombs (2007) is a vital executive role. The end result of failure can have grave harm to stakeholders, culminating in an organization or institution incurring extensive losses that can lead to its extinction. PR practitioners form an essential part of crisis mitigation in any management team. Crisis Communication therefore refers to a particular section that deals with the reputations of an organization's stakeholders. Crisis communication is a plan which aims at shielding the reputation of an organization and upholding its public image. Various factors such as criminal or terrorist attacks, investigations by government, media enquiry can taint the image of an organization.

Coombs (2007) further defines crisis as a series of unwanted events at the place of work which lead to strife and major disorder amongst individuals. Crisis usually arises unexpectedly and triggers a feeling of danger and panic in the employees. Simply, crisis leads to doubt and causes major harm to the organization and its employees. It is therefore, essential for employers to anticipate crisis and forewarn their employees against the likely negative consequences that may emerge. Crisis not only affects the smooth operation of any organization it also poses danger to its brand name.

1.1 The relationship between Crisis Communication and Strategic Communication

The current uncertain environment brings with it opportunities for crises, which are magnified by the proliferation of both traditional and new media. As a result, organizations have prioritized crisis communication (Coombs, 2007). Crisis communication is vital to successful crisis management and is therefore more about managing the product, the cause, and the public's opinion of a crisis (Gray, 2003). In actual fact, crisis communication is associated with utilizing information to identify risk and in spurring mitigating behaviors that can reduce the risk, coordinate support and recovery in cases where a crisis occurs (Ulmer, et al, 2007).

In institutions and or organizations, the glue that binds all the actions and operations, internally and externally is no doubt communication. Therefore, communication is critical to the effective performance of any enterprise (UoNCP, 2014). During an emergency, the need to communicate is instant. If the day to day operations are interfered with, the stakeholders will want to know their fate in view of the crisis. Regulators as well as local government officials will need to be informed of what is happening in their environs. Employees and their families will be anxious and will demand to be informed of what is happening. People residing near the institution may need information especially if their livelihoods are threatened by the incident. Ready communication and or answers will be demanded by all these "audiences" as the crisis management team ready themselves to communicate the crisis episode during the various stages. (www.ready.gov/business/implementation/crisis).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

According to Bernstein (2013), no organization is immune to crises. Therefore, the importance of efficient crisis communication cannot therefore be downplayed as it assists organizations in tackling the crisis that has the probability of bringing, a lot of harm to the organization's image and reputation hence overall business performance (Fearn-Banks, 2007).

Bernstein (2013) further posits if any institution does not prepare, it will incur more damage. While conducting a susceptibility audit from previous crisis related plans it emerged that the first step in crisis preparedness, at a glance is the failure to address the numerous issues that are communication related to crisis response. On many occasions institutional management teams do not understand the importance of internal and external communication with its stakeholders, whilst using the best-possible communication platforms to reach all targeted audiences, operational response will break down; stakeholders will be in the dark as to what is happening and as a result can quickly become perplexed, annoyed, and negatively reactive; the organization will at this point be viewed as incompetent, at best, and lax, at worst; protracting the time required to contain the crisis.

The fundamental steps of successful crisis communication are not hard, but require prior planning in order to lessen the damage. According to Bernstein (2013) therefore, the slower the response, the more damage is incurred, hence the need for crisis preparedness, response and effective communication.

Lando (2014) in one of her journal articles, states that a crisis is inevitable, to any organization or individual, anywhere and at any time. This is asserted by Argenti (2012), who posits that crises are unpredictable, and as such it is therefore not a matter of if, but when, it will occur. Institutions that have a pre-existing Crisis Communication Plan (CCP) are therefore in a better position to aptly deal with a crisis situation and bounce back to normalcy in the shortest time possible. Crisis management thus offers an organized approach for handling a crisis episode in order to have the least possible impact. Fearn-Banks (2007) on the other hand states that crisis management provides the organization a better chance to gain control of its situation since it provides a guide to managing crises.

Kinyanjui & Juma (2014), assert that planned approaches enhance service delivery and the ability of agencies to attain their goal. Strategic plans therefore must bear in mind these difficult tasks and respond to them appropriately. Therefore, the University is compelled to design a new strategic path driven by a joint vision, while taking into account the importance of its global positioning. This is the key component that propels the University's strategic plan. Thus the institution aims to put together its strengths around accredited opportunities, with a view to addressing its weak links thus reducing the threat to its growth, transitioning and role to the country's nationwide agenda and the society at large (UoNSP, 2014).

The UoNCP (2014) asserts that handling of corporate communication the world over has transitioned, in order for an organization to stay alive; it must undertake to effectively communicate with its stakeholders. Hence when we find ourselves in a crisis situation we are charged with one goal that of shielding the image of the organization by communicating the right

message, in a timely manner to the targeted audience. In order to control crisis communication in the institution and turn it around to its advantage, the institution must therefore employ speed, tact and precision.

The world over organizations are finally “getting it” about crisis preparedness, be it crisis communication, or awareness as well as response. Certainly, though stakeholder demand for pre-preparation and anticipation has increased over the past few years there is generally little change in what has been said previously and as a result many institutions and organization still remain unprepared or are significantly under-prepared for crises (Bernstein, 2013).

The University’s Strategic Plan presumes that change is a necessary and as such a legitimate worry to all stakeholders, and that the affected parties need to look at appropriate channels that can be explored, as well as the institution providing an enabling environment for staff to work as a team for the common good of the institution (UoNSP, 2014). This is what needs to be taken into consideration while preparing the institution’s crisis management plan. Question is, is this the case on the ground? This study will thus seek to investigate the effective role of communication during crises in the institution, since communication plays an integral part in crisis planning, response and resolution.

1.3 Research Objectives

General Objective

The objective of this study was to investigate the role of communication in crisis management in institutions of higher learning in Kenya.

Specific Objectives

- i. To determine the role communication plays during the various stages of crisis management at the University of Nairobi.
- ii. To determine the factors that affect the implementation of effective communication in crisis management at the University of Nairobi.
- iii. To find out what challenges affect the implementation of a crisis management plan in the institution.

Research Questions

- i. What impact does communication have during the various stages of a crisis management process at the University of Nairobi?
- ii. What are the factors that affect the effective implementation of communication in crisis management at the University of Nairobi?
- iii. What are the challenges that affect the effective implementation of a crisis management plan in the institution?

1.4 Justification of Study

According to Parsons (1996), ‘Murphy’s Law’ states that if something was meant to go wrong, it definitely will, or whatever is set to go wrong, will most definitely go wrong, when you least expect it in and in the worst of ways.

Although the study of socialization on codes of ethics shows how communication is used, and how information is disseminated and accessed, how decision-making takes place Brown (1990),

posits that investigations of more informal communication processes have not yet explicitly focused on the role communication plays in crisis management. Therefore, pertinent questions have been asked concerning how practical issues of crisis resolution within institutions of higher learning have been handled and the role communication plays in these processes. What communication channels have been explored and the tools used for the same. Coombs (1999), further states that we need to interrogate the ways in which guidelines on ethics training are used and their influence the character and choice of communication.

This study therefore, seeks to determine how the role of strategic communication can greatly impact on the image and reputation of any institution during crises. It further investigates the impact the existing UoNCP has had on students and staff alike with a view to finding out if the stakeholders are aware as to whether or not there exists a crisis communication plan in the institution and if so what the impact has been to-date; if not what it entails to come up with a crisis communication plan as the absence of both a CMP and CCP can impact negatively on any one institution. At the same time, the study will examine what challenges exist that mar crisis communication from being effective in institutions as well as strive to identify the various types of crisis the institution has experienced, how the University has handled them, and also establish the role crisis communication played during those moments. Further, the study will explore how the media was handled and further interrogate the opinions and perceptions of the employees, students, media and stakeholders.

The findings of this study will be useful to both its internal and external stakeholders in understanding the role communication plays in crisis, how, who and when to mitigate a crisis

situation. By informing its publics they will be sensitized on the need to understand what would be expected of each one of them during a crisis. Other institutions can also benefit from this study by ensuring that they too have a policy or put in place a policy which they can use to counter a crisis episode if and when it occurs and the best practices to employ in the circumstance.

1.5 Scope of Study and Limitations

Currently, the UoN's student population stands at 84,000 with both undergraduate and postgraduate students in close to 584 programmes in all its Faculties, Schools, Institutes and Centres. These students are spread across six campuses, with various units, located in different parts of Nairobi County. The University is also home to many satellite campuses in major towns in Kenya (University of Nairobi Factfile, 2015).

Therefore, given its size, the students and staff numbers, time and money constraints, it will not be possible to reach all the publics' thus it will be necessary to sample and reduce the number to a limited size. This study will target main Campus' Central Administration which is home to twenty one (21) departments as well as the Colleges of Humanities and Social Sciences and Architecture and Engineering respectively.

Another challenge that may be encountered is that of information sharing by management on information that may be considered sensitive to release to the public domain about the institution and lack of adequate knowledge of the University Communication policy by staff and students.

To mitigate this challenge, the researcher will interview students and staff randomly within a limited sample size of 150. The researcher will also use other studies that have been conducted in other institutions within the country. Due to the nature of the study the researcher will need to assure the respondents of confidentiality of the information provided. In addition, the respondents will not be expected to write their names on the questionnaires.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter examined literature from studies that have previously been conducted and are of relevance to this research. The chapter at the same time highlights the research problem to create a better understanding of the issues discussed.

In order to have clarity and conciseness, and or a proactive crisis communication plan there is need to adhere to certain guidelines. Whatever method is employed to deal with crises in the institution it must be strategic in its approach hence the role of an existing communication policy is key. These entail crafting the right message; knowing the target audience; the spokesperson in charge; and ensure the timely release of the message. As part of that plan, the crisis management team needs to formulate the best mode of communication internally and externally and agree as a team, ensuring that all the stakeholders within the institution have authority to act or better still each one of them understands their role.

2.1 Empirical Review

Institutions of higher learning are central to the social fabric of society, as well as economically vibrant and at the same time impact on the cultural development of a country. According to Higher Education South Africa, HESA (2008), state that the objective of the institution is to contribute and enhance the educational wishes and dreams of the growing youth. These institutions are charged with the responsibility for imparting knowledge and guiding young

people to carry out specific functions within the society. Crises at institutions of higher learning may affect the wellbeing of its stakeholders, security, financial stability and as well as its repute.

The Louisiana State University (2007) posits crises that occur at institutions of higher learning include strikes either by staff or students, and these can be as a result of courses taught being challenged by professional bodies, riots, acts of racism, fire outbreaks, diseases, murder, rape, robberies, administrative and or governance issues. This also seems to resonate with the Kenyan situation. In the recent past it has been witnessed, professional bodies claiming to approve some of the professional courses offered in institutions of higher learning specifically, Engineering and Law courses; these are the Engineering Board of Kenya (EBK) and the Council of Legal Education (CLE) (Wachira, 2015). Top public institutions have not been spared mention in these situations. These professional bodies have stated that the professional courses taught in most of these institutions do not meet the threshold of the professional bodies. Institutions mentioned comprise Kenyatta University (KU), Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology (JKUAT), Egerton University (EU), Moi University (MU), the University of Nairobi (UoN) and the Technical University of Kenya (TUK) just to mention a few.

This has on many occasions led the public to question the credibility of the courses offered by public institutions. The common questions raised are, how government institutions can offer courses that are not approved or legalized and or is it that the institutions lack the capacity to teach the said degree programs? Instead of allowing the stakeholder to speculate what is required is a quick response. Assurance needs to be given so that any student joining a public

university is aware that the services provided are legitimate as a result of the institution being owned by the government.

In a study carried out by Nganga (2015), during the initial crisis, the Engineering Board of Kenya discredited a substantial number of degree courses offered at the school of engineering in various universities, alluding that these are not accredited by the regulatory body. In the event the students who were already admitted ended up being suspended indefinitely with no signs of long term solutions being adopted by the parent ministry and the relevant bodies, this would mean that the students' life is left hanging on a balance. Hence, innocent students end up caught in the confusion of the confused learning system in our institutions. What does this mean therefore? Simply, this then according to public perception, leads to doubt that some of the courses being offered by universities do not meet the minimum threshold of approval by these professional bodies. The events herein enable one to understand the underlying dynamics of decision making in the absence of information that would directly link these events to would be possibility of stakeholder mistrust. Hence the impact of effective communication from the institutions' management on this is vital.

In another related case, the Council of Legal Education ordered the closure of Moi University's Law school which was established in 1994 and is evidently one of the oldest law faculties in the country. The institution's management was asked to draw a transition plan for the exit and or transfer of students from Law studies to other institutions that were accredited. The council, which also stopped two campuses affiliated to the University of Nairobi from admitting new law

students, found holes in the capacity of the MU's Law school, saying that the physical facilities and teaching resources were inadequate to warrant accreditation.

However, this is a claim that the university has since disputed, stating that it was well equipped to run Law courses since it had done so for many years (Nganga, 2015). The Council of Legal Education at the same time gave Mt Kenya University (MKU) and JKUAT provisional clearance to offer Law courses, pending a review of their applications. This order therefore means according to Nganga (2015) that only University of Nairobi's Parklands campus, Strathmore University and KU – are accredited by the regulatory body to offer law training. MU and the UoN are credited with having trained most of Kenya's current crop of lawyers, magistrates and judges.

Other crises involve staff who are either unhappy about something that is work related, probably their terms of service, or their working conditions this has been seen in the recent past and or the students not happy with the living conditions in their halls of residence. These types of crises are purely administrative and require quick solutions to avert possible labour unrest and student riots. Communication is therefore critical and has to be employed together with information being provided fast in the shortest time possible with quick well thought through solutions being provided to control possible escalation of the crisis.

Notable therefore, is the fact that a crisis management plan for any institution is a “must have” and should as a result be comprehensive, have clarity in leadership assignments; this should include an assessment component supported by training and coordination among all departments

within the institution. It is through these learned experiences elicited from previous responses to crises that leadership learns how to anticipate as well plan for the next crisis event.

It is evident therefore, in order for management in institutions of higher learning to be in a better position to counter and or avoid these types of crisis they must have in existence a crisis management plan to effectively communicate during crisis episodes. It is also noteworthy that the many forms of communication, traditional and new, ought to be employed due to the rising number of people who rely on modern technology to access news. Hence for effective implementation of this, there is need to have a communication policy in place.

Usually crisis communication focuses on explaining the meaning and impact of stakeholders, provision of adequate information about the crisis occurrence and extent of damage or harm to property and reputation (Ahmed, 2006).

2.2 Theoretical Review

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).

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 (CMP) 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 CMP 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 management helps an institution have a soft landing when faced with a crisis as it provides a guide that helps in putting into action solutions that quickly help ease the effect of a crisis. (UoNCP 2014).

Of importance is the awareness created by communication in the crisis communication plan. An institution must be in a position to promptly act, with precision and speed during an emergency during the various crisis stages. The various target audiences must be reached with the relevant messages specific to them. The institutions image could be seriously tainted if wrong decisions are made (<https://www.ready.gov/business/implementation/crisis>).

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. According to the University of Nairobi (UoNCP, 2014) it is possible however, that information does not reach people who do not use some of those methods of communication (such as email) may not always be read by shop floor workers. However, one thing is evident; a well designed communication policy would guide the formation and successful implementation of a crisis communication plan.

It is important that the crisis management team know the audiences it intends to reach out to 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 supervisors could at times give varied, conflicting messages on important issues. This 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 institutions has thus not been without challenge. This has led to negative publicity in some instances leading to the bad image institutions have had to suffer. 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.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

As communicators, it is essential to understand why people behave the way they do, thus the attribution theory asserts that the ways we deduce behavior traits of others has a lot to do with how the audience will perceive things. Coombs (2007) asserts that the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) offers a guide for understanding this dynamic. SCCT provides a structure that is able to anticipate and interpret the likely reaction of stakeholders to a crisis in terms of the reputational risk posed to them during a crisis episode.

2.3.1 Attribution Theory

This study draws from Heider the founder of the attribution theory, who posits that generally people tend to infer causes in terms of how they perceive a situation and how the factors related to the event they are faced with impact on the individuals being. (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). The attribution theory is relevant to this study in that the experiences that the institution encounters during a crisis determine what cause of action is necessary to take. The plan of action and steps of implementation during crises resolution will be based on individual dispositions experienced during particular situations. Hence the reason the attribution theory is ideal for this study.

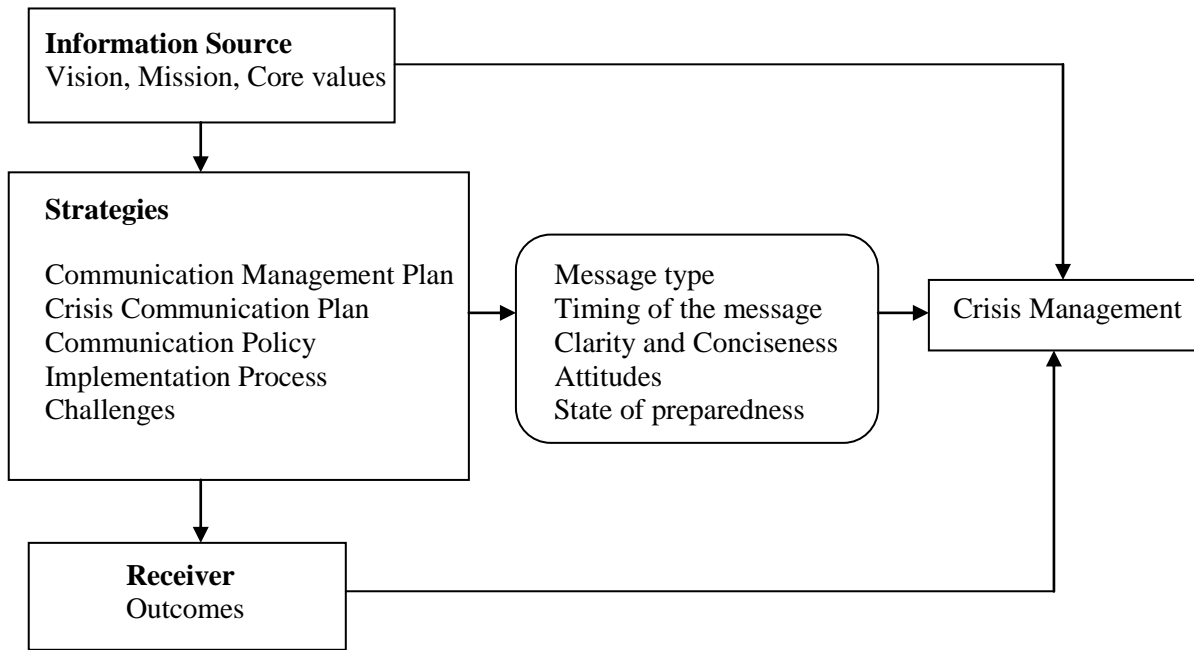
2.3.2 Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

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 communication 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 institution; 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.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Fig. 1 Conceptual model for strategic crisis communication



Independent variables

Intervening variables

Dependent variable

Researcher, 2016

2.5 Explanation of the Variables

In this study the independent variable is the various procedures and policies employed by institutions of higher learning to mitigate crises. On the other hand, the dependent variable will be the pivotal role that communication plays in the laying down of crisis management plans and how through effective communication they are rolled out to avert a would be ‘*out of control*’ crisis. The intervening variables which are also referred to as mediating variables are hypothetical in nature because they cannot be observed in an experiment, but are used to explain causal links between the dependent and independent variables.

The conceptual framework in this study looks at the relationship between the independent and dependent variables as well as the intervening variables that come to play and how this framework can be applied by any given institution/and or corporation during times of crisis.

Strategy is as a result of the past events and how they unfolded; the present institutional positioning; and the future plans that the institution intends to put in place. How relevant a strategy is will depend on peoples varied perceptions. There is the overall corporate strategy for the institution the forms a basis for the strategic leader. It therefore draws from the institutions vision and mission and involves viewing the institution in the now, and projecting where management would like to see the institution in the near future, and coming up with a roadmap on how to get there. Therefore, for an effective crisis communication plan to be rolled out effectively there is need to have a communication policy that is understood by the institutions' publics that will act as a reference guide. Hence, the very essence of a crisis communication plan, is to spell out the values, strategy, practices and processes that the institution will embrace in fostering excellent internal and external communication.

The conceptual framework therefore, outlines the relationship between the dependent variable, which in this case is the role communication plays in averting crisis and the independent and intervening variables that draw from the strength of the dependent variable.

2.6 The Role of Crisis Communication

Crisis management according to (Coombs & Holladay, 2006) is designed to ease the destruction a crisis can exert on an institution and its publics during a crisis episode. As a process, crisis

management has various stages all of which are critical to mitigating a crisis. These are the pre-crisis, the crisis response as well as the post crisis response phases. These three stages are critical in crisis response in that the decisions made from the initial stage through to the final stage will determine how soon the crisis will be contained or how long it will take to bring back normalcy to the institution and its publics. It involves thinking, mobilizing of the public, awareness creation, emergency response and managing the crisis.

Effective crisis management handles the threats sequentially Coombs (2014). Before a crisis strikes, it is imperative to think through who will comprise the crisis team. Of necessity also, is the inclusion of personal details of all the members who constitute the crisis team. This is vital information, as it would comprise each individual's name, the title they hold, their home and mobile numbers and other pertinent contact details. During the crisis, the team is charged with the responsibility of making decisions and propelling the communication plan in action and subsequent crisis mitigation. Freeo (2007).

During a crisis situation the appointed spokesperson should endeavor to engage the media before the crisis is rife. This would entail identifying the spokesperson of the institution who is well trained and has a solid knowledge base on ways and means of mitigating a crisis. Different crisis episodes will have different spokespersons. It is also advisable for any institution to strive at training a few spokespeople in crisis mitigation so that the team comprises of experts in crisis mitigation.

Different institutions have structures that exist that clearly spell out the managerial hierarchy during a crisis episode. These spell out who will be part of the various processes that are put in place to mitigate a crisis. An effective team is the one that has approved policies and procedures in place well in advance as this is essential to crisis response as the team acts in a timely manner with a view to protecting an institutions image. Time is of essence and rather than waste time having a ready plan that can be readily rolled out will do the institution a lot of justice to the reputation of the institution.

2.7 Research Gaps

As in any relationship, communication is crucial this is according to Wamae (2011). Therefore the need to keep the channels of communication open and accessible with the institutions publics as well as business partners cannot be overemphasized. A relationship can only stay alive if the parties involved maintain an open line of communication. There is need therefore, for higher educational institutions to embrace crisis management communication plans.

Many scholars agree on the importance of a crisis communication plan and strategy, however, they do not look at the critical role effective communication plays in crisis management and execution of the same as it involves the message type, timing of the message, clarity, precision and understanding each other. The message communicated during a crisis episode should and must be clearly understood in order for the right cause of action to be taken. It is vital therefore, to underscore the need for a communication policy as a reference tool for effective implementation of a crisis communication plan.

It is also noteworthy, that a communication policy provides a basis on how best to execute a communication plan during crises. This study will therefore examine the critical role communication plays during crisis management; as well as the pivotal role played by different spokespersons in institutions of higher learning and how effective communication acts as a guide to the rolling out of a crisis strategy and success of the same in the shortest time possible.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The methodology used in this study is discussed in this chapter. The study focus was on research design, the study area, target population, sampling design and procedure, sampling techniques and sample size, administration of data instruments, data analysis, validity and reliability of the study as well as ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

The aim of this study was to establish the important role communication plays in crisis management in institutions of higher learning; a case study of the University of Nairobi. In an effort to achieve the objective of this study the researcher used the mixed method approach. The study was conducted through a survey and interviews since the population size was too large, it was the most appropriate way of collecting original data. The design was appropriate as it provided the researcher with a guide on how to get factual data and or thoughts and attitudes of the institution's public. The study set out to investigate the existence of crisis communication plans, and the implementation processes of the same in institutions of higher learning and the outcomes therein with greater focus on the role communication policies play in effective communication and information dissemination during crisis episodes. Questionnaires were administered by the researcher and research assistants to the University of Nairobi fraternity.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted at the University. The University of Nairobi, established under the Universities Act 2012 of the laws of Kenya and the University of Nairobi Charter, is a corporate body, and at the same time is the pioneer institution of university education in Kenya and within the region. It is located in Nairobi County, on Harry Thuku road and is home to six campuses all of which are situated in the central business district and its environs facilitating easy access, and as a result has been an asset that has seen the university increasingly become the busy hub and citadel of academic activity at all times.

3.3 Target Population

In this study, the researcher identified the target population as the University of Nairobi fraternity. The University community comprises staff and students. Others involved are external stakeholders and publics. The University is home to approximately 84,000 students, 2,052 academic members of staff and 5,525 administrative and technical staff (UoN factfile).

The study focused on main Campus's Central Administration Division which constitutes twenty one departments, the Colleges of Humanities and Social Sciences and Architecture and Engineering so as to get a representative sample size. In order to draw information from knowledgeable key informants, purposive as well as stratified random sampling methods were used by the researcher, by way of interviews and questionnaires. The reason for using the two colleges was because the College of Humanities and Social Sciences is the largest college and combined with College of Architecture and Engineering was according to the researcher representation enough of the other colleges.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The study relied on purposive sampling in order to achieve the desired representation from the population. Stratified random sampling was also used to draw data from the researcher's target population. The stratified random sampling procedure was therefore used to get data from the different staff cadres and students within the institution ranging from Management, Administrators, Accountants, Auditors, Secretaries, Academic staff and students. The survey targeted 150 respondents.

STRATA	POPULATION	FREQUENCY
Staff	College of Architecture and Engineering	15
Students	College of Humanities and Social Sciences	20
Staff	Central Administration	70
Key Informants	Central Administration	70
TOTAL RESPONDENTS		150

3.5 Data Collection Methods

In order to collect relevant information, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were used. Qualitative research was used to get descriptive, in-depth data from both the key respondents as well as from the respondents who were administered with the questionnaire. This type of data cannot be quantified and therefore draws from individuals opinions.

On the other hand quantitative research was used in order to enumerate the problem by way of generating statistical data and frequencies that can be counted. This method was used to put a figure on attitudes, opinions, reactions, and other distinct variables – and simplify the results from a large sample population.

3.6 Data Collection instruments

In order to collect data the researcher used two research instruments which were developed to collect the relevant information mainly the questionnaire and interviews schedule for the key respondents.

3.6.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were self-administered to students and staff and had both open and closed ended questions based on the research objectives (see Appendix I). They are ideal in collecting large amounts of data and since those administered with the questionnaire comprised the bigger study population this was appropriate for the study, however the respondents were randomly selected.

3.6.2 Interview Schedule

An interview schedule was designed in order to obtain in-depth data from key informants within the institution's management (see Appendix II). The schedules were aimed at standardizing the interview situation to ensure that uniformity in all the interview sessions was maintained. Through the interviews the researcher was able to minimize issues of non-response from the respondents.

3.7 Validity

Validity is meant to establish the relationship between the data collected and the variable or construct of interest. To ensure accuracy of data the researcher pre-tested the questionnaires and analyzed the results and made amendments where necessary. The researcher visited the sample population to sensitize them about the study. This ensured that the data collected was valid.

3.8 Reliability

Reliability is concerned with relevance of the questions asked. It seeks to measure the level at which a research instrument would give rise to the same results after repeated trails. The researcher administered the questionnaire to a few respondents and repeated the same after two weeks. This was aimed at achieving consistency of the questionnaire and affirms the responses from the target population.

3.9 Data Analysis Techniques

Chandran (2004) defines sampling as the method of selecting a adequate number of elements from the study population so that a study of the selected sample represents the population adequately. Besides, an understanding of its properties or characteristics makes it possible to generalize such properties to the wider target population elements.

Data collected through questionnaires and interviews was analyzed. Qualitative analysis was done thematically and descriptively. Quantitative data analysis was done using the Social Science Statistical Programme. Tables and graphs were generated in order to draw distinct frequencies of the various factors on the role of communication in crisis management.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

In any social research, considerations such as confidentiality and avoidance of deception are important. Best practice demands to always avoid breach of confidentiality. In the case of this study, the researcher did not intend to do anything or was not expected to be misconstrued as a breach of confidentiality.

The researcher undertook to write a concept note which was followed by the writing of a project proposal. The proposal was successfully defended at the School of Journalism before a panel of Examiners and permission granted to proceed to the field to collect data. The researcher then embarked on preparation of data collection tools, which comprised a questionnaire and a schedule for key informants in order to guide the study.

The researcher sought permission from the relevant authorities, that is the School of Journalism (see Appendix III) and the University of Nairobi's, office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Research, Production and Extension (see Appendix IV) and subsequently proceeded to carry out the said study within the framework of the provisions enabling an academic project of this kind. While collecting data from the respondents, confidentiality was assured to the respondents as this was crucial.

The project was thereafter successfully defended before a Board of Examiners, and corrections proposed by the panelists. The researcher then proceeded to make the said corrections. On completion of the corrections, a Certificate of Corrections (see Appendix V) was given to the researcher. A plagiarism check was done and a 9% plagiarism score given which was below the minimum required level of 15% (see Appendix VI). Where other authors' works were acknowledged within the project APA referencing was used. The Declaration of Originality form (see Appendix VII) was attached in line with the research guidelines provided by the University of Nairobi.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

4.0 Introduction

The study sought to assess the role of communication in crisis management in institutions of higher learning. The data was collected and processed in response to the objectives of the study. 140 questionnaires were distributed and 10 interviews carried out with key informants. 115 questionnaires were returned 80 from staff and 35 from students; some of the questionnaires were however not returned. Thus, the data presented in this chapter was obtained from 125 out of the proposed 150 study sample, giving an 82 per cent response rate. From the study the researcher established that the response rate was attributed to the fact that the respondents were guaranteed anonymity hence freely responded to the interviews as well as questionnaire. According to Mbwesa (2006) a 50 per cent response rate is adequate for research. Respondents were also given ample time to respond to the questionnaire.

4.1. Demographic Information of Respondents

The study sought to find out more about the study sample. This was important to the study in order to establish the kind of respondents in this study. The following sub-sections present this data.

4.1.1: Distribution of the Respondents by age

The study sought to find out the age distribution of the respondents. This was important because the study was meant to be a representation of all ages within the University. Table 4.1 below presents the findings.

Table 4.1: Distribution of respondents by age

Age Distribution	Frequency	Percent
50 Years and above	18	16.2
40 - 49 years	30	27.0
30 - 39 years	20	18.0
20 - 29 years	38	34.2
Below 20 years	5	4.5
Total	111	100.0

(Source: Field data 2016)

From the table, it was evident that majority of the respondents fell between the ages of 20-29 years of age and represent 34 per cent of the study sample. The minority group of respondents fell in the category of below 20 years of age giving a representation of approximately 5 per cent of the study sample. The second largest group of respondents was in the category of between 40-49 years age bracket representing 27 per cent of the study sample. Whilst the age bracket of between 30-39 years represented 18 per cent and the age bracket of 50 years and above represented 16 per cent respectively.

4.1.2: Distribution of the Respondents by Gender

The study sought to know the distribution of the respondents on the basis of gender. This was important to the study as it shows the gender equity of the respondents. Table 4.2 presents this data.

Table 4.2: Distribution of the Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	64	57.7
Male	47	42.3
Total	111	100

(Source: Field data 2016)

From the data presented in Table 4.2 above, approximately 58 per cent of the respondents were female, in comparison with the male gender comprising 42 per cent of the study sample. It emerged from the study that more female respondents participated in the study *vis a vis* the number of male respondents. From the study results therefore, it is evident that the female response was higher.

4.1.3: Level of Education of respondents

The study sought to find out the level of education of the respondents. This was important as it helped to represent all the various educational levels of the respondents. Table 4.3 below presents the findings.

Table 4.3: Level of Education

Level of Education	Frequency	Percent
University	106	95.5
Tertiary	5	4.5

(Source: Field data 2016)

From Table 4.3 above, it was evident that the level of education of majority of the respondents had attained university education giving a 96 per cent rating. On the other hand, only 5 per cent of the respondents had attained tertiary education.

From Table 4.3 above, the study shows that majority of the respondents were graduates. It also emerged that those who had attained university education were better able to understand and resonate with the content of the questionnaire satisfactorily. Those who had not attained university education returned either incomplete forms or did not return the questionnaires at all.

Similarly, the key respondents interviewed, all hold senior positions in the institution and as a result are holders of university education and therefore were better placed to react to the questions posed to them.

4.1.4: Marital Status of respondents

The study sought to find out the marital status of the respondents. This was important as it provided the researcher with a better understanding of the respondents. Table 4.4 below presents the findings.

Table 4.4: Marital Status of respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
Widowed	3	2.7
Married	59	53.2
Single	49	44.1
Total	111	100

(Source: Field data 2016)

According to Table 4.4 below, it is clear that 53 per cent of the study sample were married, whereas 41 per cent represented the singles category, and the minority group of approximately three per cent of the respondents, were widowed.

4.1.5: Respondents Religious Affiliation

The study sought to find out the religious affiliation of the respondents. This was meant to further understand the type of respondents the researcher was dealing with. Table 4.5 below presents the following findings.

Table 4.5: Respondents Religious Affiliation

Religion	Frequency	Percent
Others	3	2.7
Muslim	5	4.5
Protestants	54	48.6
Catholic	49	44.1
Total	111	100

(Source: Field data 2016)

Table 4.5 shows that 49 per cent of the respondents in the study were Protestants while, Catholics represented 44 percent of the study sample; 4.5 per cent proclaimed the Muslim faith and approximately 3 per cent comprised other denominations. The ‘others’ category was occasioned by some of the respondents not being able to place themselves in either categories of Catholics, Protestant and/or Muslim. The aspect of religion for the researcher was to understand the kind of respondents who participated in the study.

The question of the respondent’s religion was aimed at finding out what religious affiliation the respondents belonged to as part of the demographics and whether or not it would affect their responses based on their beliefs

4.1.4: Respondents Professional affiliation

The study sought to find out the professional affiliation of the respondents. This was important in understanding the respondents better. Table 4.6 presents the findings.

Table 4.6: Respondents professional affiliation

Religion	Frequency	Percent
Others	3	2.7
Muslim	5	4.5
Protestant	54	48.6
Catholic	49	44.1
Total	111	100

(Source: Field data 2016)

Table 4.6 above, shows that the student population recorded the highest percentage response rate whereby 36 per cent of the study sample, were students. The clerical staff, technologists, secretaries, accountants formed the second highest percentage group representing 27 percent of the study sample followed by the administrators who comprised 24 per cent of the survey population.

It emerged from the survey that a significant number of respondents were from Administration Division. This is attributed by the fact that as Administrators, they are closely involved and privy to matters that inform formulation and implementation of policies hence their response. Academic staff (*lecturers and professors combined*) formed 10 per cent and 2 per cent of the study sample respectively. This distribution in the respondents was occasioned by some

academic members of staff being reluctant in filling out the questionnaire citing being too busy or having a heavy workload.

4.2: The role played by communication during the various stages of crisis management

This section seeks to underscore the role communication plays during the three stages of the communication. The three phases are the pre-crisis stage, the crisis response phase and post-crisis response phase. The table below presents this subset of findings.

4.2.1: Importance of Communication in Crisis Management

The study sought to find out the role communication plays in crisis management. This was important as it would guide the respondents' views on the importance of communication in managing a crisis. Table 4.7 presents the findings.

Table 4.7: Importance of Communication in Crisis Management

Importance of Communication	Frequency	Percent
Important	110	99.1
Not important	1	0.9
Total	111	100

(Source: Field data 2016)

From the findings drawn from the survey, it was evident from Table 4.7 above that majority of the respondents concur with the fact that communication plays an important role in the management of a crisis. Approximately 99 per cent of those interviewed emphasized the vital yet critical role played by communication, whereas only 1 per cent disagreed that communication is important.

How communication is relayed during a crisis episode can determine whether the crisis will escalate or be contained. On the other hand all the key respondents also affirmed that:

“Communication ought to be effective as this could elicit a positive or negative response. They affirmed that communication to the stakeholders could be enhanced for it to be more effective especially during crisis situations. They reiterated the fact that there was room for improvement given that when communication is effectively employed during a crisis the institution’s image can be protected and confidence restored to the institution’s stakeholders”.

It therefore emerged, that communication is critical during crisis episodes. The way a message is packaged and disseminated to the stakeholders is of essence as this could either elicit a positive or negative response. 1 key respondent stated that

“Communication is the glue that binds people together and there is no way an institution can manage and or solve a crisis without communication”.

According to Anthonissen (2008), the essence of a crisis communication plan is to provide a guide of the principles, practices as well as processes that an institution will adopt in developing excellent internal and external communication.

4.2.2: Awareness about the University of Nairobi’s Communication Policy

The study sought to find out whether the respondents knew about the existence of the University’s communication policy. This was important to the study as it would guide the course of action to take by management. Table 4.8 below presents these findings.

Table 4.8: Awareness about University of Nairobi Communication Policy

Awareness Status	Frequency	Percent
Awareness Status	65	58.6
Not Aware	46	41.4
Total	111	100

(Source: Field data 2016)

From Table 4.8 it is evident that a good majority of staff and students comprising 58.6 per cent of respondents seemed to be aware about the existence of the institution's communication policy. However, another 41 per cent did not know about its existence. It is important to note that a communication policy is vital in any institution as it acts as a guide on how to disseminate information to the institutions stakeholders.

The researcher was able to deduce that those who were not aware about the existence of the communication policy, this was attributed to either their ignorance or lack of interest in knowing what is happening around them especially the staff, considering the fact that the communication policy had been posted on the staff intranet as one of the many documents under the university's policy documents since 2014 and was information at everyone's disposal. The other reason could be lack of adequate sensitization drives by management to create awareness on its stakeholders on issues of policy. This resonates with what authors Bernstein (1986), Barton (1993), and Fearn-Banks (1996) say about Crisis communication plans and strategies. They posit that these offer the medium of collection and information dissemination in a timely manner during a crisis episode.

4.2.3: Effectiveness of a Communication Policy

The study sought to know the respondents opinion on the effectiveness of a Communication Policy. This was important to the study as it would show how effective the communication policy has been in disseminating of information. Table 4.9 below presents these findings.

Table 4.9: Effectiveness of a Communication Policy

Effectiveness of a Communication policy	Frequency	Percent
Effectiveness	107	96.4
Ineffective	4	3.6
Total	111	100

(Source: Field data 2016)

From Table 4.9 above, it is evident that 96 per cent of the sampled cohort agreed that a communication policy is an important document as it provides guidelines to the stakeholders on what the institutions expectations are about communication issues. Only 3.6 per cent of the study sample did not hold the same view. Those in agreement felt that an effective communication policy emphasizes the importance of communication to its stakeholders and what the institutions management has set out to achieve.

However, it was noteworthy to cite from the key respondents that:

” In their view it emerged that the communication policy had not quiet been implemented fully. A lot more needed to be done to improve the channels of communication in existence. They cited that this could be achieved probably through greater presence in the web portal and people being informed of issues as they unfolded through social media and or twitter handles”.

According to the UoNCP (2014), it is noteworthy to state that in any institution or organization, the glue that binds all functions and activities, is no doubt communication for both its internal and external stakeholders. It is therefore, vital to the effective functioning and productivity of any enterprise.

4.3 Factors that affect the implementation of a Crisis Management Plan

The research sought to determine the effects of the implementation of a crisis management plan. This was important to the study as it would investigate the factors that can aid or hinder the successful implementation of a crisis management plan. The sub-sections below present the findings.

4.3.1: Awareness about the University’s Crisis Management Plan

The study sought to find out whether the respondents were aware about the institutions Crisis Management Plan. This was important as the findings would guide policy implementation. Table 4.10 below presents these findings.

Table 4.10: Awareness about the University’s Crisis Management Plan

Awareness about a crisis management plan	Frequency	Percent
Awareness	21	18.9
Not aware	90	81.1
Total	111	100

(Source: Field data 2016)

Table 4.10 clearly shows the percentage ratings of the respondents on their awareness about the university’s crisis management plan. It is noteworthy to cite that the majority of respondents, 81 per cent did not seem to know about the existence of a crisis management plan. A minority of 18.9 per cent mainly from the university’s administration seemed to be aware

According to the 10 key respondents, a divergent opinion emerged citing that:

“The university did actually have a crisis management plan in place. They cited that according to the UoN’s communication policy there were structures that were stipulated and were meant to be put in place in order to formulate and consequently

implement a crisis management plan and team. It emerged that even though this had not been effected there exists a crisis management team, under the armpit of the Vice Chancellor's office that is charged with crisis response issues if and when they arise. According to the institution's communication policy, the office of the VC is charged with the responsibility of dealing with crisis issues when they arise. It was also apparent that when faced with a crisis the VC is able to mobilize a team to deal with the crisis at hand. For instance, if the crisis touches on student matters the team would comprise either of the DVCS'. Other key players would be the Dean of Students (DOS), the Special Student Advisor (SSA), the relevant Registrars as well as the College Registrars. But constitution of all these teams would be determined by the issue at hand and on approval by the VC".

This therefore means that the University has established offices which translate to crisis management teams when a crisis occurs.

“Another opinion that seemed to resonate with the interviewees was that crisis at the University was managed on Ad hoc basis. That means when a crisis arises an ad hoc committee is constituted to tackle the issue the institution is faced with”.

From the above it is evident that although senior management were aware about the existence of a crisis management plan as well as team, it would be important if this kind of information was shared knowledge. Similarly, this seems to resonate with Coombs (2007), who reiterates the fact that crisis management is a critical organizational function.

4.3.2: Importance of a Crisis Management Plan

The study sought to establish the importance of a crisis management plan in containing a crisis situation. This is important to the study as it will help draw the right conclusions based on the respondents' reactions. Table 4.11 below presents these findings.

Table 4.11: Importance of a Crisis Management Plan

Importance of a crisis management plan	Frequency	Percent
Important	107	96.4
Not important	3	2.7
Total	110	99.1
Missing data	1	0.9
Total	111	100

(Source: Field data 2016)

Table 4.11 shows the frequency and percentage rating on the importance of a crisis management plan. It was evident from the findings that 96.4 per cent of the respondents felt that the role a crisis management plan played was vital. Only 2.7 per cent disagreed that it was important. 0.9 per cent did not respond to the question.

It therefore is clear that a good majority were of the opinion that in order for the institution to counter or contain a crisis situation at hand, a crisis management plan is of essence and a must have, as it would provide a guide on how to contain a crisis in the shortest time possible thus averting a crisis. Hence, they unanimously agreed that a crisis management plan is a key document that every institution ought to have.

It also emerged from the majority of respondents that it was important in this day and age of crisis episodes for an institution to have a crisis management plan, since crises can happen to

anyone, at any-time and when you least expect them, thus as an institution we ought to be prepared at all times to counter crisis. On the other hand, the key respondents too seemed to resonate with the same idea that:

“A CMP will thus allow the crisis management team to pre-empt and anticipate what has happened and come up with better effective solutions for future. It also prepares an institution in the event a crisis erupts. For example, the power blast and consequent fire outbreak in Kikuyu Campus in 2015. Good communication is fundamental; if communication relayed to the public during this incident was not well designed and specific it would have caused a lot of anxiety both to students and parents alike. Thus a CMP should be perceived to be a think tank of some kind, as it provides guided solutions on how to respond to a particular situation. A CMP is not a definite guide on how to manage a crisis”.

This idea too confirms what authors Lerbinger (2012), Coombs (2015), and Low, Chung and Pang (2012) posit that a crisis management plan is indeed a time saver during a crisis by way of assigning tasks, gathering information, and serving as a point of reference during crisis response.

4.3.3: Effect of communication on stakeholder reactions during a crisis episode

The study sought to investigate the effect of communication on stakeholder reactions during a crisis episode. This is important to the study it would help the researcher assess how stakeholders reactions get affected by communication. Table 4.12 below presents these findings.

Table 4.12: Effect of communication on stakeholder reactions during a crisis episode

Effect of communication on stakeholder reactions	Frequency	Percent
Effective	107	96.4
Not effective	3	2.7
Missing	1	0.9
Total	111	100

(Source: Field data 2016)

According to Table 4.12 above 96 per cent of the study sample agreed that it was important to communicate a crisis when it happens in the most effective way in order for it to have an impact in the shortest time possible. Only 3 per cent of the study sample disagreed. There was however, 1 per cent who did not react to the question.

The message timing is therefore essential because one needs to be able to respond to a crisis at the appropriate time when action is required. People cannot therefore wait until things get out of hand then begin to run around looking for solutions, at that time it will not be possible to address anyone. When a matter comes back for conversation or debate or interrogation; it is important that, that matter be addressed at that time and in a way that every other stakeholder can understand, appreciate and participate again.

The key respondents as well affirm that:

“ Although communication is vital in crisis management at the university the size of the institution also posed a challenge for the simple reason that if a crisis were to occur in a campus for instance at Kikuyu campus over the weekend on a day when the management is not around during a crisis episode, by the time the management gets to know about it and a crisis management team is mobilized, so that decisions are made on how to manage the crisis, this would have had a negative impact by the time the situation is contained”.

They went to further reiterate that:

“People tend to take others seriously given the way they package their message. Packaging of the message has a lot to do with understanding the crisis itself and designing the message aimed to a specific target. The language with which you communicate with needs to be understood by all. The channel or platform of communication to be used should be one that the stakeholders have access to; for instance it maybe one has placed a press statement and or release in the newspapers and the stakeholders have no access to the same and as a result they will never know what it is that was communicated, hence eliciting no response”.

Strategy and effective communication are key elements that are employed during successful crisis management. Without these the health and safety of an institution’s stakeholders and the

reputation of an institution/organization are at risk. "What an organization chooses to say affects how the public perceives both the crisis and focal organization" (Stephens & Malone, 2009).

4.3.4: Effectiveness of the Internet

The study sought to investigate the effectiveness of the internet as a communication tool. This is important in that the study would gather whether this is the best communication platform to be used during crisis management. Table 4.13 below presents the findings.

Table 4.13: Effectiveness of the Internet

Effectiveness of the Internet	Frequency	Percent
Effective	97	87.4
Not	14	12.6
Total	111	100

(Source: Field data 2016)

From the data shown in Table 4.13 above, it is clearly depicted from both its frequency and percentage ratings that 87 per cent of the respondents thought the internet is effective in communication. Only a negligible percentage of 12.6 per cent of the sampled cohort disagreed about the impact of the internet in communication. It can therefore be deduced that the respondents use the internet as a communication tool and agree that it is important in resolving crisis. A good majority were in agreement also that the internet is an effective communication tool and can reach a larger population in real time.

According to the respondents that were sampled the majority agree that the internet is an effective communication tool which they say provides a great deal of information and as a result

is a useful and reliable source of information gathering and or sharing. Similarly, the key respondents also resonated with the thought that:

“The internet increases the speed and scope of communication. It enables information to be transmitted faster reaching out to a wider population spatially. The internet provides the ability to personalize communication to specific target groups in a timely manner. However, the internet as a means of communication suffers the drawback of lack of access to the internet by large number of people within the institution”.

The UoNCP (2014) affirms that since the handling of corporate communication the world over has transitioned, the only way in which any organization can survive and thrive, is by employing effective communication strategies with all its stakeholders, the internet being one.

4.3.5: Importance of Coherence and Consistency in Crisis Management

The study sought to find out whether coherence and consistency in crisis management was necessary. This is important to the study as it shows how coherence and consistency affects crisis management. Table 4.14 below presents these findings.

Table 4.14: Importance of Coherence and consistency in Crisis Management

Importance of coherence and consistency	Frequency	Percent
Necessary	103	92.8
Not necessary	7	6.3
Total	110	99.1
Non response	1	0.9
Total	111	100

(Source: Field data 2016)

According to Table 4.14 above, it would suffice to say that from the respondents reactions it was evident that 92.8 per cent of the respondents agree that coherence and consistency of a message

during a crisis mitigation episode is extremely necessary. On the other hand, a negligible 6 per cent of the student and staff sampled in this study did not agree that coherence and consistency was important. A 9 non response on this issue was also depicted.

It can be deduced therefore that the majority respondents were in agreement that if a message is coherent and consistent when put across to the stakeholders it would elicit the right response from the stakeholders in the shortest time possible because it will have been understood. Whereas, if a message is aimed at a specific target population and is incoherent or inconsistent, it would lead to confusion thus escalating the problem at hand. Likewise, the key respondents affirm that,

“Coherence and consistency ensures credibility of information and is reassuring to the audience”.

Vital to managing a crisis is coherence and consistency. There are times when crucial information may not reach the publics’ when and where they need it. Without this vital information at the right time the decision-making process could be marred. (<https://www.ready.gov/business/implementation/crisis>).

4.3.6: Effectiveness of a Crisis Management Plan

The study sought to establish how important the implementation of a crisis management plan is. This is important to the study because from the findings the researcher is able to deduce the impact of a crisis management plan. Table 4.15 below presents these findings.

Table 4.15: Effectiveness of a Crisis Management Plan

Effectiveness of a crisis management plan	Frequency	Percent
Effective	99	89.2
Ineffective	12	10.8
Total	111	100

(Source: Field data 2016)

Table 4.15 shows that 89 per cent agree that implementation of a crisis management plan is no doubt important and only about 11 per cent were of the opinion that it would not be effective. Those who agree were of the opinion that, if there was a crisis management plan in place it would act as a guide and provide quick solutions on how to go about solving a crisis.

A crisis management plan however, would need to be a document that has analyzed different crisis situations and thus provide would be guidelines and what the expected outcomes would be when confronted with a crisis situation. Crisis communication plans and strategies provide the means to gather and release information as quickly as possible during a crisis. According to Whaling (2010), he posits that the more preparations are put in place ahead of time, the quicker one is able to respond if a crisis does strike.

4.3.7: Effectiveness of a Strategic Plan

The study sought to establish from the effectiveness of the strategic plan in managing a crisis. This was important as it gives the views of the respondents on how important a strategic plan is the process of crisis management. Table 4.16 below presents these findings.

Table 4.16: Effectiveness of a Strategic Plan

Effectiveness of a Strategic Plan	Frequency	Percent
Effective	85	76.6
Ineffective	26	23.4
Total	111	100

(Source: Field data 2016)

Table 4.16 clearly shows that 76.6 per cent of the respondents felt that having a strategic plan in place played a crucial role in crisis management. Only 23.4 per cent differed with this opinion. Those who agreed felt that a strategic plan lays down the strategy and or steps as well as providing a basis for formulation and consequent implementation of crisis management plan.

The university's strategic plan therefore is the 'blueprint' that directs management on how divergent issues, activities and or processes can be handled and offers would be solutions for the same. Hence, a strategic plan is an essential document for any institution. It is truly the engine that drives every institution. This is affirmed through the university's strategic plan where the institution aims to put together its strengths around accredited opportunities, with a view to addressing its weak links thus reducing the threat to its growth, transitioning and role to the country's nationwide agenda and the society at large. (UoNSP, 2014).

4.3.8 Factors that determine the formation of a Crisis Management Plan

The study sought to find out what factors determine the formation of a crisis management plan. This was important to the study as it would show what components are key in the formation of a Crisis Management Plan. Table 4.17 below presents the findings.

Table 4.17: Factors that determine the formation of a Crisis Management Plan

	Formulation of crisis management plan	Developing and implementing communication policy	Putting into place crisis management plan	Developing a strategic plan
Chi-Square	68.189 ^a	95.577 ^a	91.901 ^a	31.360 ^a
df	1	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000
Monte Carlo Sig.	.000 ^b	.000 ^b	.000 ^b	.000 ^b
99% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	.000	.000	.000
	Upper Bound	.000	.000	.000

(Source: Field data 2016)

According to Table 4.17, we can deduce that all the above mentioned factors are significant and therefore important in the implementation of a crisis management plan. However, what emerged significantly was the importance of developing a communication policy. This implies that due to its significance as shown in Table 4.17 above, this factor would be a key determinant in guiding the development of a crisis management plan. This means therefore, that for a crisis management plan to be formulated and implemented there would have to be in existence a communication policy as this is what would determine the designing and gradual implementation of a crisis management plan.

Similarly, the UoNCP (2014) affirms that there is no doubt that the handling of corporate communication the world over has transitioned, hence if an institution/organization has to stay alive, it must therefore employ effective communication strategies when dealing with all its stakeholders.

4.3.9: Factors that impact Crisis Communication

The study sought to investigate the factors that impact crisis communication. This was important to the study as it provides the views of the respondents on the importance of the various factors that affect crisis communication. Table 4.18 below presents the following findings.

Table 4.18: Factors that impact crisis communication

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication is essential in crisis mitigation	111	3.8198	.54269
Crisis management team is necessary	111	3.4234	.87956
Timing of message is critical to crisis mitigation	111	3.4775	.87227
The type of message should be well thought through	111	3.6126	.70287
Public perception is important	110	3.2091	.84696
Message should be persuasive	110	2.9545	.98973
Valid N (list wise)	109		

(Source: Field data 2016)

Table 4.18 explains what in the opinion of the respondents was considered important in crisis mitigation. The mean scores depict the strength of each of the elements as spelt out in this table. On a scale of 1 to 4 the mean reading of communication as essential in crisis mitigation came out strongest, whereas the message being persuasive was the weakest. Looking at the standard deviation readings, the variation between the factors is minimal, meaning that the respondents affirmed that all these factors are necessary in crisis management. Where the standard deviation reading is larger, in comparison to the mean, it therefore means that the views of the respondents are divergent.

This therefore means that these two readings are very vital in crisis management. It also emerged that whereas communication is essential in crisis mitigation, the message design and message timing are also very important as they determine how the stakeholders understand the message, thus contributing to the right response at the right time.

4.3.10: Factors that affect implementation of a Crisis Management plan

The study sought to investigate the factors that affect the implementation of a Crisis Management plan. This is important to the study as it shows how the respondents' rate the different factors that affect the implementation of a crisis management plan. Table 4.19 below presents these findings.

Table 4.19: Factors that affect implementation of a Crisis Management plan

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	1.453	24.212	24.212	1.453	24.212	24.212
2	1.108	18.463	42.675	1.108	18.463	42.675
3	1.098	18.302	60.977	1.098	18.302	60.977
4	.909	15.156	76.132			
5	.808	13.459	89.592			
6	.624	10.408	100.000			

(Source: Field data 2016)

Table 4.19 above shows the results at 61% of the variation in implementation of a crisis management plan and was explained by the three components extracted as stipulated below (see Table 4.20).

Table 4.20: Communication components that affect a Crisis Management plan

	Component		
	1	2	3
Communication is essential in crisis mitigation		.531	
Crisis management team is necessary		.622	.569
Timing of message is critical to crisis mitigation			.540
The type of message should be well thought through	.630		
Public perception is important	.506		.656
Message should be persuasive	.603		

(Source: Field data 2016)

Table 4.20 above shows that the three elements shown in component 1 are closely correlated and are key indicators in crisis management. These imply that the way a message is designed is important and must thus be persuasive in order for the public to perceive it as such. This would therefore, elicit the right response within the shortest time thus containing a crisis. As for component 2, the two elements shown indicate that it is necessary for any institution to have a crisis management plan and that communication is essential in crisis mitigation. Component 3 vividly depicts that the timing of a message, during crisis mitigation by a crisis management team, is important to the public as it shows their state of preparedness in crisis mitigation.

Gray (2003) affirms that crisis communication is vital to successful crisis management and is therefore more about managing the cause, effect, and stakeholder opinion of a crisis.

4.3.11: Channels of Communication

The study sought to investigate the various channels of communication and how they are used. The information depicted in the table below shows the various communication channels that affect crisis management. Table 4.21 below presents these findings.

Table 4.21: Channels of Communication

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Press statements	111	3.05	1.060
Face book	111	2.95	1.077
Media framing	108	2.89	.998
Public perception	111	2.81	.968
Emails	111	2.68	.88587
Twitter	111	2.6216	1.00049
Valid N (list wise)	108		

(Source: Field data 2016)

Table 4.20 highlights the various channels and or platforms of communication that can be used during a crisis episode. The respondents seemed to agree from the mean score readings that press statements are very important in passing on information and reacting to crisis episodes; that Face book, and Twitter handles were popular forms of communication especially with the youth hence a good medium of communication especially when targeting the youth. They felt that public perception had a lot to do with how the stakeholders will respond to your message design during a crisis and as such difficult to quantify. Emails were least popular probably due to their being a more traditional form of communication.

4.4 Challenges that affect the implementation of a Crisis Management Plan in the institution

The study sought to investigate the various challenges that hinder the effective implementation of a crisis management plan in the institution. It also sought to get an in depth understanding of respondents on how best these can be addressed by the management of the institution.

4.4.1 Challenges

According to the respondents several challenges that emerged were associated with management of crisis episodes. The challenges identified operate at various stages of crisis management including the planning phase, execution of plans and post communication. Furthermore, the challenges were cited as external to the communicating entity as well as internal to the institution. The challenges mentioned include fear and uncertainty, contradicting messages and inadequate resources. Other challenges cited were unpreparedness by the communicating entity, managing the rumors, distorted messages and poor timing of communication. External challenges comprised lack of or limited freedom of speech. Lack of use of effective communication channels to address problems the institution is faced with and improper message design and timing which ought to be communicated to the stakeholders. If the crisis management team does not identify its targeted audience the message could be directed to the wrong audience and as a result will not be effective.

Similarly, the key respondents the same and cited that:

“Mistrust which was as a result of the stakeholders feeling that their grievances are never listened to; when this happens it fuels mistrust. When stakeholders come up with resolutions and or way forward in respect to certain issues and then the respective key players who are expected to implement the decisions reached do not do so in the stipulated time, this could also pose a challenge. Another challenge cited was that of the players not being transparent and open with each other on

information sharing leading to insincerity. When stakeholders are not ready to participate in offering or providing solutions to problems this was seen to contribute to crisis”.

“Delays in taking necessary action is another challenge that was cited. Other challenges that were cited were human resource not being well briefed to tackle challenges when they arise; since a crisis should be anticipated before it actually happens; is something that is managed as it happens; and is something that is thought about afterwards. Stakeholders have to prepare themselves psychologically for any eventuality. This ofcourse requires a team that has no self interest and is well trained in issues communication related. By putting in place a CMP this can help counter crisis situations”.

“3 of the respondents felt that we must be ready and prepared for any eventuality by planning ahead. In organizations with a good PR team, they are charged with thinking about what will happen by carrying out media monitoring which helps in informing the institution of a problem. The other challenge that was cited was the institution being expansive in that should a crisis happen say in Kikuyu campus over a weekend, and management happens to be away it can pose a challenge and would lead to considerable delay in mobilizing the key players and have them reconvene in time to contain the crisis at hand”

“The students in the institution are highly informed about issues and may start anticipating the next move management is likely to take when handling certain issues that they are agitating for e.g. burning of halls of residence. The location of the institution is another challenge since during times of riots, it becomes difficult to contain the problem and people can easily disappear into the central business district making it difficult to make any arrests”.

According to Ahmed (2006) crisis communication usually focuses on clarifying issues affecting the stakeholders and stating the impact they are bound to have, through provision of adequate information about what has happened and what is on-going and extent of damage or harm to property and reputation.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the key findings of this study, as spelt out in the research objectives, the conclusions as well as the recommendations. The chapter will endeavor to carry out an assessment on crisis management at the University of Nairobi with greater focus on the role of communication in institutions of higher learning. It will at the same time undertake to give a summary of the data analyzed, whilst laying emphasis on the study objectives to determine how communication is employed during the various stages of a crisis episode; as well as and determine what factors affect the effective implementation of a crisis management and the challenges or opportunities that affect the effective implementation of a crisis management plan.

5.1 Summary

This study found that majority of the respondents in this study were in the category of under 29 years of age representing 34 per cent of study sample whereas those in the ages of 20 years and below were in the minority and were represented by 4.5 per cent of the study sample. On the other hand the study established that majority of the respondents were of female gender representing 58 per cent of the bulk of the respondents whereby 96 per cent of the respondents were university graduates from the study sample.

It thus emerged from this study that 47 per cent of the study sample, majority were Protestants and a minority of 3 per cent fell in the category of others. The other category is those who were either non-believers or belonged to other religious affiliations such as the Jehovah witnesses.

The highest percentage of respondents was from the student fraternity and comprised 36 per cent of the study sample. This is an indication that they were more receptive to responding to the questionnaire as opposed to other members of staff some of whom were either too busy or did not respond at all or were reluctant to fill the questionnaires.

As to whether or not the stakeholders knew about the existence of the university's communication policy and its importance 58 per cent responded in the affirmative. This was an indication that a good number of the stakeholders knew about the communication policy's existence whereas 41 per cent of the study sample did not. Majority of those respondents who were not aware comprised mainly the student fraternity. However, on the part of the staff, this could be attributed either to ignorance or lack of interest on the part of the stakeholders or failure on the part of the management on sensitizing staff and students on the same.

On the importance of communication in crisis management it was evident from the data collected that almost everyone was in agreement that it was vital, representing 99 per cent of the study sample. This is an indication therefore that communication is key in managing a crisis and if not well employed could escalate a crisis thus impacting negatively on the institution. During a crisis episode the message has to be strategic in content such that it will elicit a quick response from the stakeholders thus containing a crisis within the shortest time possible.

On whether the respondents were aware about the university's crisis management plan majority of the respondents were not aware, representing an 81 per cent rating. However, the interviewees who comprised senior management were privy to the fact that even though the

institution did not have a structured crisis management plan in place it did have structures that exist that were tantamount to having a crisis management plan. However, 96 per cent of the respondents were in agreement that a crisis management plan was critical in resolving a crisis situation and that the existence of one would provide a guide on how to deal with crisis. The existence of a CMP provides a state of preparedness in the event a crisis occurs.

This study also revealed that the role communication plays in crisis management is essential; this was echoed by 96 per cent of the study cohort. The respondents were in agreement that effective and strategic communication was a key determinant in crisis aversion. The mode and form of information dissemination during a crisis can make the difference between escalating the crisis and containing the crisis. It also emerged that the way the message is designed and communicated to the stakeholders is important as it dictates how the stakeholders react to help avert the crisis. This was affirmed by the study sample represented by 96 per cent.

On the issue of the platforms and or channels of communication used, according to the study sample 87 per cent were in agreement that these were important. The respondents agreed that in order to disseminate information that is critical to its stakeholders a good channel of communication was necessary. It emerged that the preferred mode of communication was social media especially by the student fraternity. Members of staff preferred communication through use of press releases for external stakeholders as well as, emails, circulars and memos even though these were traditional modes of communication, as they are effective in information sharing, although from the study findings a lot more can be achieved by proactively engaging in other forms as well. The respondents advocate that the institution ought to embrace the modern forms of communication to keep in tandem with the changing trends.

On the effectiveness of a strategic plan in crisis management and resolution, it emerged from the study that approximately 77 per cent of the study sample affirmed that a strategic plan was of importance in crisis resolution. 10/10 of the key informants resonated with the idea that it was the driving force of policy in the institution and therefore crisis management was guided by strategic objectives and decisions. It also emerged that a strategic plan lays down the strategy and or steps and provides a basis for the implementation of a would-be crisis management plan.

On the other hand a good number of respondents felt that the stakeholders did not seem to know who the spokesperson was. This they attributed to the fact that in the institution when decisions are reached the crisis management team most of the time cannot divulge its deliberations without first consulting the VC since they may not know what his position is on the same. Further the respondents felt that at times, the VC may not communicate anything to his publics without first consulting the University Council, the University Executive Board or the Senate.

The 10/10 of the key respondents agreed that at corporate level the VC who is the institutions Chief Executive Officer, is the key spokesperson as per the Communication Policy 2014, however, the policy allows the VC to delegate to other key player(s) of the institution; he therefore has the express mandate to delegate the same to a person of his choice. It depends on who it is that has been assigned the responsibility, be it the Corporate Affairs Director, the Public Relations Manager or the DVC's, or any other person in a position of authority as determined by the CEO. The VC can appoint his designated appointee depending on the crisis in order to communicate to the public on behalf of the VC, and thus represent the true position of the institution during a crisis.

Based on this the respondents affirmed that the CEO is understood to be the key spokesperson of the institution. This is understood by all and sundry starting from the management, staff, students and external stakeholders as a whole. For instance, the students as well as staff know who to channel their grievances to when faced with a crisis.

It emerged that there were several challenges that hinder crisis mitigation at the institution. For instance, one of the challenges cited was mistrust which was as a result of the stakeholders feeling that their grievances are never listened to; when this happens it fuels apathy. Another challenge was that of information sharing and or dissemination by management which emerged top of the list. The general view of the respondents however, was that stakeholders were not effectively informed about crises when they occurred at least most of the times. However, given that the university is a huge establishment, it would not be possible to know what is happening in every corner of the institution

5.2 Conclusions

This study sought to investigate what communication strategies should be put in place to mitigate crisis episodes in institutions of higher learning. At the same time, institutions must be able to predict and or anticipate crisis situations and come up with a crisis communication plan to counter the same in the event a crisis should occur thus leading to crisis preparedness. It further interrogated how effective strategic crisis communication has been employed within the University and what channels of communication have been employed and how this has impacted on the institution during times of crisis. The study sought to address the opinions and perceptions of the students and staff, as well as key respondents on the same.

This project explored the different forms of communication that are and can be used to mitigate crises for example, through use of the UoNCP as a communication guide, internet, social media, newspapers, emails and how they can help their successful application by providing the public's with a ready resource of information to understand a crisis situation; and by creating a way to sharing critical, timely information in the shortest time possible to stakeholders, crisis managers and communicators. On the same breath, Holmes (2011) asserts that poor communication practices can hinder an institution's mode of crisis communication through spread of untruths at rapid speed for example, via unethical media practices as well as social media malpractices.

The importance of communication in crisis management was emphasized. Crisis is inevitable, it is not something that we can predict but the institution needs to be prepared in the event it does occur. Communication therefore is the glue that binds everyone in the institution, it is therefore important for crisis mitigation. The general overview by the respondents is that the institution should engage the media more proactively and be alive to the fact that it is necessary to involve the media in crisis episodes. Communication stems rumor-mongering. All communication structures need to be employed during a crisis at short notice to work for the benefit of the institution.

The findings show therefore, that the institution is able to contain a crisis on time without it escalating as well as be able to draw from and learn from its past experiences. Crisis strengthens an institution and helps it ready itself for any and every eventuality as it paves way for the crisis management team who then become visionary by anticipating crisis and providing guidelines that would help ease a crisis when it occurs. When an institution attempts to arrest a crisis early

enough then it is able to arrest the worst of consequences. If the institution lets things follow their own course it may ruin its image in the face of the public. It is not always possible to anticipate a crisis so when confronted with one it presents challenges.

A crisis need not be student related, for instance in Kikuyu campus last year, the explosion in the halls of residence caught staff and students unawares but management took it upon itself to inform the public through regular updates of what was happening and this was well received by the stakeholders as they appreciated the flow of information. Outcomes enable the institution to safeguard its image. Without proper mitigation mechanisms the institution can face irreparable damage to the institution. They also help to counter the negative perception of untruths in the public domain by putting things into perspective. They at the same time ensure people are aware of what is happening in the institution.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Recommendation for Policy and Practice

Based on the findings it emerged that the best practices for crisis preparedness is to be able to anticipate as much as possible what is likely to happen and device ways or formulate guidelines which may be used when confronted with a crisis to contain the situation with ease and in the shortest time possible. The institution should be able to dedicate resources that can be used in case of crisis, however this may be a challenge as it can be a costly affair. By having a laid down procedure or guideline which could be used as a reference point during a crisis would be something that ought to be thought about and implemented. This would therefore mean that there would have to be a crisis management team in place charged with that responsibility. This

team would virtually be ready and prepared at all times for any eventuality by planning ahead to counter crisis episodes. In organizations with a good PR team, they are charged with thinking about what will happen by carrying out media monitoring which helps in informing the institution of a problem.

It also emerged that the majority of students and staff alike did not seem to be aware about the existence of a CMP in the institution. It however, was evident from the key respondents that although there did not exist a structured CMP, the University had established offices which translate to crisis management offices when a crisis occurs. It therefore was proposed that the institution's management should take it upon itself to communicate and sensitize its stakeholders on matters related to crisis management. It would be in the interest of the institution if the stakeholders know the institution's spokesperson, and who comprises the crisis management team of the university. Apparently, ninety nine per cent of study sample affirm that there has to be someone with a pulse to know what kind of communication is needed at what point; that is why it is important to have a crisis management team and plan in place, but the centre of it being communication.

It also emerged that the PR office was not adequately utilized despite it being an integral part of any institution and or organization, especially in times of crisis. This statement lends credit to the fact that the PR office and or the Corporate Affairs office in many institutions are charged with the responsibility of dealing with and diffusing a crisis when it occurs and this they do in close consultation with management. The study sample recommended that the PR office should be more visible in matters pertaining to public relations, crisis management matters included.

The study findings show that there is need to beef up security within the institution especially during this era of terrorism, student and staff unrests, increased crime just to mention a few. A proposal was put across that the institution needed to engage more senior security officers round the clock should there be a serious crisis that needs quick response. The staff in the security department would therefore need to be facilitated and well equipped. It is also necessary that refresher courses be carried out regularly so that they can update their existing skills in line with the changing trends. The respondents felt that management needed to be alive to this fact and work towards enhancing security within the institution.

During a crisis situation it is important to involve the media because the media is a powerful medium of communication. It is important to stay in touch and update the media of the situation at hand so that they can communicate the same to the stakeholders internal and external alike. Failure to do so opens avenues of media speculation, leading to misreporting and in the process fuelling the crisis further. Other respondents felt that enough was not being done in terms of engaging the media because occasionally the institution will release a press release. It also emerged that on many occasions the media try and force stories out of the stakeholders on issues that affect the institution thus not representing the true position of the institution.

5.3.2 Recommendation for further research

The study revealed from the data collected that the existing channels and platforms of communication were not too bad but could be improved and enhanced in order for them to become more effective. It was noteworthy to state that the communication policy had not quite been implemented fully; and a lot more needed to be done to improve the channels of

communication in existence. A proposal was that this could be achieved probably through greater presence in the social media and by people being informed of issues as they unfold. However, the information would need to be censored so that only what needs to get out to the public domain does whereas the rest is retained.

Another challenge cited that would need to be addressed was lack of use of effective communication channels to address problems the institution is faced with. It was also evident that the improper design and timing of messages that ought to be communicated to the stakeholders, that is, if the crisis management team does not identify its targeted audience the message could be directed to the wrong audience and as a result will not be effective.

It was clear that delay in taking necessary action was another challenge that was cited. It emerged that human resource were not well briefed to tackle challenges when they arise; since a crisis should be anticipated before it actually happens; as opposed to the institution managing it as it happens. Stakeholders have to prepare themselves psychologically for any eventuality. This of course requires a team that has no self interest and is well trained on issues pertaining to communication. Hence an effective communication plan as well a crisis management team are key for any institution.

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APPENDIX I

RESPONDENTS QUESTIONNAIRE

I am a student of the University of Nairobi conducting a research on the role of communication in crisis management in institutions of higher learning: A case study of the University of Nairobi as part of the requirement for the Master of Arts in Communication Studies degree.

Kindly, answer the following questions by ticking in the appropriate brackets or filling the spaces provided.

SECTION 1: GENERAL

Please tick (✓) in the appropriate bracket or answer as required.

Q1. What is your age in years?

Below 20 yrs () 20-30 yrs () 30-40 yrs () 40-50 yrs ()

50 yrs and above ()

Q2. What is your gender? Male () Female ()

Q3. What is your highest level of education? Secondary () Tertiary ()

University ()

Q4. What is your marital status? Single () Married () Widow(er) ()

Q5. What is your religion? Catholic () Protestant () Muslim ()

Q6. What is your profession? Student () Secretary/Technologist ()

Administrator () Lecturer () Professor ()

SECTION TWO: LEVEL OF AWARENESS

Q7. Do you think it is necessary to have a Communication policy? Yes () No ()

Explain

Q8. Have you heard about the University of Nairobi Communication policy?

Yes () No ()

Q9. Do you think communication plays a pivotal role in managing crisis in institutions of higher learning? Yes () No ()

Explain

Q10. Q.8 What is your understanding of crisis management?

.....

Q11. Do you know the University's crisis management plan?

Yes () No ()

Q12. Is a crisis management plan important in crisis resolution? Yes () No ()

If so why, explain

Q13. How does communication impact on crisis communication during the pre-crisis, crisis response and post-crisis stages?

.....

Q14. Do you think communication enhances reactions/performance during a crisis episode?
 Yes () No ()

Explain.....

Q15. Does the internet serve as an effective communication tool in the institution?
 Yes () No ()

Explain

Q16. Do you think that coherence and consistency in crisis communication is necessary?
 Yes () No ()

Explain

SECTION THREE: IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE TOOLS OF CRISIS MITIGATION

Q17. The following are tools that are employed to mitigate crisis. In your opinion, indicate which are the most critical in crisis resolution by ticking (√) the brackets provided

Communication tools used	Effective	Least effective
Formulation of a crisis management plan based on the institutions vision, mission and core values	()	()
Having a communication policy	()	()
Having a crisis management plan	()	()

Having a strategic plan	()	()
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Q18. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements on their impact in crisis mitigation. Please tick (✓) where appropriate

Key:

Strongly Agree – SA; Fairly Agree – FA; Agree – A; Disagree – D;

	SA	FA	A	D
Communication is essential in crisis mitigation				
A crisis management team is necessary in any institution				
Timing of message is critical to crisis mitigation				
Message type should be well thought through				
Public perception is of essence				
Message should be persuasive				

Q19. Please indicate the extent to which you regard the various sources of information as having profound/or great impact on communication in crisis response

(4) To a large extent (3) To some extent (2) To a small extent (1) To no extent

Social Media presence e.g Facebook				
Public perception and attitudes				

Email communications				
Use of Twitter handles/ hashtags for information dissemination				
Press statements/press releases				
Media framing				

SECTION FOUR: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Q.20 What are the challenges or limitations faced when handling crisis episodes?

.....

.....

.....

Q.21 What channels or platforms of communication are ideal in crisis mitigation?

.....

.....

.....

Q.22 How in your opinion should a crisis episode be handled?

.....

.....

.....

Q.23 Is the message design during a crisis episode important? If so explain

.....
.....
.....
Q.24 Do you think the timing of the message during a crisis is critical? If yes, explain

.....
.....
.....
Q.25 Do you think crisis preparedness is necessary in crisis mitigation? Explain

.....
.....
.....
Q.26 What do you expect should happen during a crisis as a stakeholder?

.....
.....
.....
Q.27 As a stakeholder, do you know what your role is in crisis mitigation?

.....
.....
.....
Q.28 What in your opinion as a stakeholder are best practices for crisis preparedness?

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEWER'S SCHEDULE FOR KEY INFORMANTS

- Q.1 In your opinion do you think it is important for institutions of higher learning to have a Crisis Management Plans? Explain
- Q.2 Does the University of Nairobi have a Crisis Management Team in place? If yes/no Explain
- Q.3 In your opinion, do you think communication is important during crisis mitigation? Explain
- Q.4 What are the channels and or platforms of communication that are used to avert crisis situations?
- Q.5 During a crisis episode, who are the key spokespersons?
- Q.6 Do the stakeholders know who the spokespersons are?
- Q.7 Do the spokespersons know what role to play during crisis episodes?
- Q.8 Do you think the message design and message timing are necessary in crisis aversion?
- Q.9 Do you think the existing communication channels are effective in crisis aversion?
- Q.10 In your opinion, do you think we are prepared at all times to mitigate crisis episodes? If yes/no explain?
- Q.11 What challenges hinder crisis mitigation?
- Q.12 How do you deal with the media during crisis situations?
- Q.13 Are the stakeholders always informed of what is happening during a crisis?
- Q.14 What are the outcomes of crisis mitigation?
- Q.15 In your opinion, what are the best practices for crisis preparedness?