

**AN INTEGRATED CRISIS COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGIC
CRISIS COMMUNICATION WITH THE MEDIA: A CASE STUDY ON A FINANCIAL
SERVICES PROVIDER**

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that, **AN INTEGRATED CRISIS COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGIC CRISIS COMMUNICATION WITH THE MEDIA: A CASE STUDY ON A FINANCIAL SERVICES PROVIDER** is my own work and that all the sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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ABSTRACT

For organisations to survive in an ever-changing milieu, as evident from the current business environment, sufficient crisis communication and management practices need to be in place to ensure organisational survival. Despite the latter, organisational crises are often inefficiently managed which could be ascribed to the lack of managing crises *strategically* (Kash & Darling 1998:180). This study explores the lack of strategic crisis communication processes within the *financial industry* specifically, to ensure effective crisis communication with the *media* as stakeholder group, through the proposition of an *integrated crisis communication framework*, which focuses on:

- Combining integrated communication (IC) literature with Grunig's theory of communication excellence to build *sustainable media relationships* through *two-way communication*; and
- Implementing a crisis communication process that has *proactive, reactive* and *post-evaluative crisis communication stages*, thereby moving away from crisis communication as a predominant reactive function.

Key terms: communication, two-way communication, integrated communication, strategy, strategic communication, strategic management, crisis communication, crisis management, excellence theory, stakeholder, stakeholder relationship building.

OPSOMMING

Vir organisasies om in 'n omgewing wat voortdurend verander te oorleef, soos wat tans die besigheidsomgewing blyk te wees, moet daar voldoende krisiskommunikasie en bestuurspraktyke om organisatoriese-voortbestaan te verseker, in plek wees. Ondanks die laasgenoemde word organisatoriese-krisisse dikwels ondoeltreffend bestuur. Dit kan onder andere aan die gebrek om krisisse *strategies* te bestuur, toegeskryf word (Kash & Darling, 1998:180). Die gebrek aan strategiese krisiskommunikasieprosesse, toegespits op die *finansiële sektor*, sal in hierdie studie verken word om effektiewe krisiskommunikasie met die *media* as 'n belanghebbende groep te verseker deur middel van *geïntegreerde krisis kommunikasie-raamwerk*, wat daarop fokus om die:

- Geïntegreerde kommunikasieliteratuur (GK) met Grunig se kommunikasie-uitnemendheid-teorie te kombineer om *volhoubare mediaverhoudings* met behulp van *die tweerigting-kommunikasie* te bou; en
- Implementering van 'n krisis kommunikasieproses wat *proaktiewe, reaktiewe* en *evaluerende krisiskommunikasiefases* het, en sodanig van krisiskommunikasie as 'n oorwegende reaktiewe funksie wegbeweeg.

Sleutel terme: kommunikasie, tweerigting-kommunikasie, geïntegreerde kommunikasie, strategie, strategiese kommunikasie, strategiese bestuur, krisiskommunikasie, krisisbestuur, uitnemendheidsteorie, belanghebbendes, belangegroep verhoudingsbou.

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CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION AND MOTIVATION

“A crisis strips an organisation of its privacy and leaves it exposed to public scrutiny” (Williams & Treadaway 1992:57), which necessitates *strategic* crisis communication and management (Kash & Darling 1998:180).

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Modern organisations operate in a crisis environment (Verwey, Crystal & Bloom 2002:29) “in which crises are omnipresent and proliferating” (Shrivastava 1993:24). Organisations must adapt to environmental challenges in order to survive and to ensure long-term success (Keene 2000:15). Evidently, organisations face various challenges and operate in an ever-changing milieu that requires constant adaption and ultimately causes uncertainty. Grobler (2003:198) argues that organisations should become familiar with the notion of instability, high risk and irregularity as the pace of change has increased dramatically, resulting in chaotic systems.

Central to managing this organisational change and uncertainty, which is synonymous with organisational crises, lies *strategic communication*. Organisations often fail to manage change and uncertainty, mainly because communication is not viewed as a strategic function (Grobler 2003:186). According to Verwey (2003:15), organisations must apply strategic communication at individual and at organisational level to manage continuous change and to ensure organisational success (Fall 2004:239).

This chapter will elucidate this context of the study in order to highlight the purpose and background of the study, based on a solid theoretical foundation, and includes the type of study, research problem and questions, methodology, and anticipated findings.

1.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

In this section, the purpose, background, relevance and importance of the study, the relationship of the topic to the discipline of communication and other research in the field will be highlighted.

1.2.1 Purpose of the study

Crises are occurrences that threaten the *strategic* objectives of an organisation (Richardson 1994:63), and in essence, the future existence of such an organisation (Fearn-Banks 2007:8). Chong (2004:43) argues that crisis management should form part of the strategic management process, however, according to Pollard and Hotho (2006:726), this is rarely the case, as some managers regard crisis management as an insignificant activity. Ashby and Diacon (2000:7) state that although it is evident that crisis management should be integrated in the strategic management process, the relationship between an organisation's strategic environment and crisis management has not yet been clearly defined. In order to emphasise the importance of *strategic* crisis management processes, Verwey et al (2002:33) contend that "any crisis that develops into a life-threatening or image-threatening event, is most certainly a matter of failure of the corporate structure and processes, and is ultimately the responsibility of the chief executive and directors". Pollard and Hotho (2006:731) contend that the media has the power to shape the public opinion of an organisation, and therefore highlight the importance of sufficient communication and relationships with the media.

Based on this, the purpose of this research is twofold: The first objective of this research is to determine whether existing crisis communication and management processes (in theory and in practice) contribute towards the *strategic management* of a crisis as well as towards the effective communication with the *media*. The need for an *integrated* crisis communication (ICC) framework will be highlighted as the second objective of this research, in order to ensure that *crisis communication* with the media is efficiently and strategically managed. *Integrated communication (IC)* will therefore form the theoretical underpinning of the study and focuses on the combination of internal and external communication with key stakeholders (Niemann 2005:1). The discipline of IC moved away from the predominant customer focus, as was the case with its predecessor, integrated marketing communication (IMC), to a *stakeholder focus* (Niemann 2005:27). It is with this stakeholder mindset and coordination that this study aims to address the necessity of strategic crisis communication through sustainable stakeholder relationship building.

The premise of the study is specifically evaluated through a case study approach focusing on the top ten South African financial services providers for 2008. The reason for selecting the financial industry is not that it is more predisposed to crises than other industries, but that it is, indeed, a

sensitive industry that is often scrutinised, as people entrust their money to these institutions (De Lange 2008). In agreement, Van Tonder (2008) states that the banking industry, which is the dominant role player in the financial industry, is closely monitored by the media, as the demise of one bank has a domino effect on other banks. Van Tonder (2008) argues that if banks' expenditure exceeds their income, it can eventually cause a shortage in the interbank market (due to this interconnected relationship of banks) which, in turn, affects the whole economy.

The background of the study will be discussed in the following section in support of the purpose of the research.

1.2.2 Background of the study

Crisis scholars have identified various reasons why organisational crises are not sufficiently managed. These include, amongst others, the fragmented nature of crisis literature (Shrivastava 1993:25); the lack of crisis preparedness or proactive crisis management (Pollard & Hotho 2006:730; Sturges, Carrell, Newsom & Barrera 1991:23; Chong 2004:43; Kash & Darling 1998:180; Richardson 1994:59); the reactive nature of crisis management (Mitroff 2001:19); the inability to resolve issues before they develop into crises (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt 1996:81; Murphy 1996:103); and the lack of strategic management of a crisis (Kash & Darling 1998:180; Pollard & Hotho 2006:723; Preble 1997:669; Shaw, Hall, Edwards & Baker 2007:559; González-Herrero & Pratt 1996:82). The focus of this research will be based on the latter reason as it is argued that *strategic* communication assists organisations in predicting and managing various issues and dilemmas beyond their operating control (Kash & Darling 1998:179).

Although crisis communication is predominantly regarded as a reactive or response element of the crisis management process in the literature (MacLiam 2006:31; Venter 1994:211; Mitroff & Pearson 1993:102; Coombs 2007:266), the researcher will argue that crisis communication should be viewed as a pro-active and reactive element as well as an integral aspect of the post-crisis management and evaluation stage. This argument is supported by Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996:80) who state that crisis communication is a *long-term process* and should not be regarded as a responsive exercise upon the occurrence of a crisis. Furthermore, Elliot (2006:405) argues that "crisis communication is not a short-term, one shot public relations effort, or a one-way transfer of pertinent information from

organisations to the public. Instead it should be viewed as [the] establishment of permanent long-term communicative relationships with multiple internal and external stakeholders”.

Different types of crises exist, including organisational crises, environmental crises, ecological crises, terrorist attacks, psychopathic behaviours and malicious rumours (Pauchant & Douville 1992:46). This study specifically focuses on *organisational* crises which can be defined as irregular, organisationally-based happenings that simultaneously produce uncertainty and places pressure on an organisation’s objectives (Seeger, Ulmer, Novak & Sellnow 2005:79). Therefore, the focus will be on crises that are caused by organisational activities.

Various general examples of organisational crises in South Africa exist, such as Eskom and the power supply crisis, the investigation of Investec by the FSB, and the suspension of SABC’s Group Executive of news and current affairs, Snuki Zikalala, in which the mismanagement of a crisis or issue is apparent. The absence of efficient strategic crisis management and communication among organisations is obvious, which might be ascribed to the assumption made by Preble (1997:669): “the fields of strategic management and crisis management have been evolving separately, despite their potential for synergistic integration”.

1.2.3 Relevance of the topic

According to Darling (1994:4), a crisis can be regarded as both a danger and an opportunity, as is also evident in the meaning of the Chinese word for crisis *wei-ji* (a dangerous opportunity). However, Keown-McMullan (1997:4) contends that the interpretation of a crisis as a danger or threat prevails. Crises are therefore predominantly seen as disruptive events (Pauchant & Douville 1992:46; Venter 1994:211) that can challenge an organisation’s future if not properly managed. In order to effectively manage a crisis, organisations need to realise the importance of strategic crisis communication and management, as strategic planning can alert management of evolving crises (Kash & Darling 1998:180).

Darling (1994:4) further states that a positive opportunity might arise from a crisis if proper and advanced planning, which is often associated with strategy, is implemented. Preble (1997:770) supports this view by stating that strategic management focuses on the future direction of an organisation and is usually integrated with *planning* literature. Furthermore, Kash and Darling (1998:180) go as far as

stating that “strategic planning without [the] inclusion of crisis management is like sustaining life without guaranteeing life”.

The traditional view of communication as a technical function in an organisation will thus not suffice; instead, communication, as stated by Fall (2004:238), should be regarded as the fifth management function next to planning, leading, organising and controlling. Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2007:35) coincide that crisis communication is a constant process and should form part of an organisation’s *strategic* plans. This indicates that crisis communication has to be strategically managed to ensure effective interaction with all stakeholders, which can be achieved through an IC approach, described by Niemann (2005:30) as a *strategic management process*.

The need for an integrated crisis communication (ICC) framework is therefore evident to facilitate effective communication with all stakeholders. Because the media plays an integral part in communicating crises to the public, it is responsible for shaping public opinions and reactions. However, media reports on crisis events are normally fragmented, lacks objective data and is vague, leading to coverage that extend organisational crises by causing hearsay and false alarms (Shrivastava, Mitroff, Miller & Miglani 2006:35; Van Tonder 2008). This fact will then form the focus of this study.

1.2.4 Relationship of the topic to the discipline of communication

Crisis communication is a function of public relations (Seitel 2007:400; Venter 1994:209) in that a well-timed public relations reaction in a crisis minimises the possibility of inaccurate reporting and the misconception of facts, as well as possible harm to the corporate reputation (Venter 1994:209).

The terms ‘public relations’ and ‘corporate communication’ are often used synonymously, “as both disciplines focus on the management and implementation of organisations’ communication, and in most instances each addresses exactly the same issue, uses the same techniques, and relies on the same theory” (Angelopulo & Schoonraad 2006:17). Corporate communication can be ‘theoretically equated’ with public relations (Steyn & Puth 2000:6). Despite this close correlation, public relations is more *communication* focused, while corporate communication is more *business* orientated (Angelopulo & Schoonraad 2006:17). As the purpose of this study is not to analyse the differences between these two disciplines, public relations and corporate communication will be used interchangeably, as both fields, as argued earlier, focus on the management of an organisation’s communication with all stakeholder

groups. Crisis communication specifically can be described as a public relations activity of maintaining positive relationships between an organisation and its publics during the occurrence of a crisis to ensure the future existence of such an organisation (Venter 1994:211).

According to Argenti (2003:42) and MacLiam (2006:3), the head of corporate communication must have access to the highest level of senior management, practicing the communication function as part of top management, directly reporting to the CEO, and not as a separate function managed by public relations officers. The absence of such a structure will result in a less effective communication function (Argenti 2003:42).

As the focus of this study is to highlight the lack of the *strategic* crisis communication with the media, IC guides the research, as Niemann (2005:29) argues that IC encompasses all strategic organisational communication.

1.2.5 Other research in the field

According to the Nexus Database (2008), no other research is currently being undertaken on the anticipated topic. Research conducted on crisis communication is therefore limited. The following dissertations have been completed on crisis literature during 2001 to 2006:

A conceptual model of crisis communication with the media: a case study of the financial sector (MacLaim 2006); *Local government and crisis communication: an exploratory study* (Horak 2006); and *The Swiss banks: a communication crisis management perspective* (Bloom 2001).

As the researcher aims to explore *strategic* crisis communication and to emphasise the necessity for an integrated approach, this study can therefore be regarded as an original contribution to the field.

1.3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The fundamental areas that will be discussed in the literature review are strategic communication and strategic management, which will be contextualised through IC. Furthermore, the theoretical framework of this study, with a core focus on the excellence theory, will be discussed followed by an elaboration on the various perspectives on organisational crises. Strategic management and strategic

communication will be discussed as an introduction to the literature review as these aspects serves as the anchor for this study.

1.3.1 Strategic management and communication

Freeman (1984:85) and Richardson (1994:60) claim that one of the contributions of strategic management implementation is that it points towards the direction and activities of an organisation in the future. This is relevant in the crisis context, as it will assist an organisation in preparing for and avoiding possible crises (Richardson 1994:60). Preble (1997:770) states that the strategic management process comprises strategy formulation, implementation and evaluation phases, which are indicative of the proactive, reactive and post-activity qualities of strategic management. Carpenter and Sanders (2007:7) describe strategic management as the process employed by organisations in which the necessary instruments and structures are applied in order to develop and implement a *strategy*. They further define strategy as a “central, integrated, externally orientated concept of how a firm will achieve its objectives” (Carpenter & Sanders 2007:8). Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002:143) maintain that strategic management is the process that addresses and identifies organisational problems. They further argue that the postmodern perspective of strategic management should prevail; “the view of strategic management as a subjective process in which the participants from different management disciplines assert their identities” (Grunig et al 2002:143).

This need for strategic relationship building as part of the strategic management process is highlighted by Grunig et al (2002:2) who state that organisations face numerous demands from internal and external stakeholders, and therefore rely on a communication expert to interact and build relationships with stakeholders. In order to build sustainable stakeholder relationships, Wright (2001:18) argues that communication should not be a one-way process; opportunities for *dialogue* and *feedback* have to be created in order to strengthen stakeholder relationships. Therefore, it is evident that *two-way symmetrical communication* should be applied, which is defined by Grunig et al (2002:15) as the attempt to align the interest of an organisation with its stakeholders and the utilisation of communication as an essential instrument to *manage conflict* with stakeholders. Consequently, applying strategic two-way symmetrical communication as a *continuous* process will assist an organisation in managing and resolving organisational crises.

The importance of regarding communication of as a *strategic* function is inevitable, as communication is the connection between strategy and desirable outcomes (Grates 1995:16). Furthermore, Grunig et al (2002:274) similarly state that “communication professionals need to rise to the occasion and assume a more strategic role. They need to integrate the various marketing and communication support functions”. For the purpose of this study, the need for *strategic* communication will be addressed through the application of *IC*.

1.3.2 Integrated communication (IC)

According to Duncan (2002:8) and further refined by Niemann (2005:30), integrated communication (IC) can be defined as “the **strategic management process** of organisationally controlling or influencing **all messages** and encouraging **purposeful**, data-driven dialogue to create and nourish **long-term profitable relationships** with **stakeholders**”. The essence of this study is encapsulated in this mere definition: to explore and to motivate *strategic crisis communication* through an integrated crisis communication (ICC) approach, thus the *combination of all internal and external communication* in order to deliver *efficient* crisis communication with the media, instilled through *sustainable relationship building* with the media as external *stakeholder* group.

1.3.2.1 The evolution of IC: from integrated marketing communication (IMC) to IC

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is a marketing communication concept that identifies the value of a detailed plan to evaluate the strategic roles of a combination of various communication areas, for example, general advertising, sales promotion, direct response and public relations in order to provide “clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact” (Kitchen & Schultz 1999:23).

According to Grunig et al (2002:270), the misconception of IMC and the inability to decide whether it either served as an instrument to assist in selling advertising and public relations services or whether it served as a unique communication field, led to the demise of the IMC discipline. Niemann (2005:29) is of the meaning that a shift from IMC to the more *strategic approach* of IC emerged so that IC is regarded as “an umbrella term for all strategic organisational communication” (Niemann 2005:29). For the purpose of this study, an integrated crisis communication (ICC) framework will be proposed to instil *strategic* crisis communication with the media. IC will therefore be the core driver of the study.

Further to the discussion of strategic management and communication, predominant features of IC require elaboration, namely the combination of internal and external communication; and stakeholder centrality.

1.3.2.2 The combination of internal and external communication

According to Barton (1990:16), “if a team is dysfunctional before a crisis occurs, that team will have a dysfunctional response during an incident”. This statement places emphasis on the importance of a sound internal organisational culture in order to efficiently detect, manage and resolve external issues. Furthermore, Seitel (1989:381) and Wright (1995:191) also state that for an organisation to promote positive external communication, a sound internal communication climate is essential. In addition, an IC structure is required as it is built on the principle that there should be *interaction* and *synergy* between internal and external communication (Niemann 2005:29).

The principles of internal communication or employee communication (Skinner, Von Essen & Mersham 2005:92) promote an emphasis on two-way communication and participation (Hendrix 2004:98), as well as the initiation of stable interpersonal relationships (Van Staden, Marx & Erasmus-Kritzinger 2002:15). It can therefore be argued that internal communication is necessary to achieve mutual understanding among internal stakeholders, which is essential in managing external challenges.

Conversely, Heath (1994:230-231) states that external communication assists organisations to build stable relationships with external stakeholders, facilitated by internal stakeholders’ opinion of the organisation. Van Staden et al (2002:14) define external communication as “verbal and non-verbal communication between the organisation and the outside world that is clients, suppliers, shareholders, the media and the public” and argue that effective external communication is imperative for the growth and development of a stable image.

Based on the above, it can be argued that in terms of crisis communication, internal communication is vital to keep employees informed in order to communicate consistent messages to external stakeholders as part of the crisis resolution process. Mitroff and Pearson (1993:122) maintain that “crisis prepared organisations focus on both internal and external communication”. In accordance, Booth (1993:278) contends that effective communication, including internal and external communication, is critical

during crisis situations. Thus, the need for an *integrated* crisis communication (ICC) approach, whereby internal and external communication are synergised, is evident.

1.3.2.3 Stakeholder centrality

One of the dominant evolutionary differences between IMC and IC (as discussed in Item 1.3.2.1) is the shift from a customer focus to a *stakeholder* focus (Niemann 2005:27). Organisations function in the stakeholder century which implies a dominant focus on the needs and wants of stakeholders (Niemann 2005:28). Stakeholders refer to all groups and individuals, both internal and external to an organisation, who have the ability to influence and to be influenced by such an organisation's accomplishment of its objectives (Freeman 1984:25). It can therefore be regarded as everyone who has an interest in an organisation.

According to Carpenter and Sanders (2007:46), stakeholders' interests, needs and preferences must be thoroughly studied as stakeholders can make it difficult to execute a strategy. It is thus essential to have a clear understanding of the needs and wants of the media (as one of the key stakeholder groups) in order to build sustainable relationships which is essential for effective crisis resolution.

1.3.3 Theoretical framework

Various theories employed in crisis situations will be discussed in order to highlight their key attributes. Specific focus will be placed on the excellence theory as it is argued that it is the most relevant to provide a theoretical framework for IC with the media through the utilisation of two-way symmetrical communication.

1.3.3.1 Crisis theories

A critical evaluation of the following theories predominantly applied in crisis situations sets the scene for the theoretical underpinning of this study: chaos theory (1996), Coombs' situational crisis communication theory (2004), the stakeholder theory (1984), Grunig's situational theory of publics (1992), Benoit's image restoration theory (1997), and Grunig's excellence theory (1992) which will be the core focus of this study.

According to Murphy (1996:95), the chaos theory attempts to understand the behaviour of nonlinear and unpredictable systems. Although the chaos theory is a practical model that resembles the cycle of

crisis situations, the theory is more useful as “an analogy than a source of practical solutions for relationships between organisations and their stakeholders” (Murphy 1996:110). As the aim of this study is to employ strategic crisis management through sustainable relationship building, facilitated by IC, this perspective will not suffice.

Coombs’ (2004) situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) argues that information on historical crises create perceptions on present crises. These perceptions should guide the communication responses in an attempt to protect the reputation of an organisation (Coombs 2004:266). This theory does give the necessary credit to the value of communication in crisis situations, but only as a predominant *response* element. This stands in contrast to the argument posed in the research of viewing communication as an integrated and continuous process where communication should be proactive and reactive and form part of post-crisis evaluation. Another limitation of the SCCT theory is that it does not acknowledge the importance of stakeholder relationships, which is necessary for an IC perspective.

The stakeholder theory developed by Edward Freeman (1984) is often applied in crisis situations as, according to Brown (2006:7), the nature of crises necessitates the urgency for communication to stakeholders and therefore highlights the workability of this theory in crisis communication. More specifically to this study, crises stimulate intense media interest (Seeger & Ulmer 2001:370), which increases the urgency for sufficient crisis communication with this stakeholder group. The stakeholder theory does accept the importance of stakeholder recognition, but fails to recognise the importance of utilising two-way symmetrical communication to facilitate a win-win relationship between the organisation and key stakeholders, which makes the sustainability of stakeholder relationships questionable.

Grunig’s (1992) situational theory of publics also recognises the importance of stakeholder interaction in crisis situations. However, Grunig et al (2002:324) argue that the theory “segments publics based on their perceptions of a situation and subsequent behaviour, not on the desire of an organisation to have relationships with them”. This directly contradicts the argument of the study of building sustainable stakeholder relationships, as the theory only focuses on the perceptions and behaviour of publics on a specific situation.

Benoit's (1997) image restoration theory focuses on the type of message that can be communicated once an organisation is faced with a crisis (Benoit 1997:178). The theory places great emphasis on the importance of post-crisis strategies in order to restore the image of an organisation, but does not address proactive and reactive crisis management steps. This viewpoint is also opposing to this study's argument about the importance of communication as a continuous process.

The main limitations of the mentioned theories include the lack of relationship building with stakeholders and two-way communication from an IC perspective. Subsequently, the excellence theory (1992) will be discussed and used as the basis for this study as it recognises the importance of building sustainable stakeholder relationships through the two-way symmetrical communication model, thus creating a win-win relationship between the organisation and key stakeholders. The theory simultaneously highlights the importance of the communication function's link with strategic management; therefore empowering communication to a strategic function.

1.3.3.2 The excellence theory

For the purpose of this study, the excellence theory is the main emphasis in the analysis of crisis theories as it is argued that this theory compliments IC principles. The excellence theory was developed by Grunig in 1984 and later expanded by Grunig and Grunig in 1992. This theory focuses on the reasons why public relations contribute to *organisational effectiveness* whilst highlighting the *monetary value* of public relations to an organisation. It is through the building of sustainable relationships with strategic constituencies that public relations contribute towards effectiveness (Grunig et al 2002:10).

Dozier, Grunig and Grunig (1995:10) state that communication excellence has three integrated spheres, namely, knowledge, shared expectations and participative culture. The knowledge sphere involves the role of management, specifically strategic management, and the knowledge of *two-way communication* is a key characteristic of an excellent communication program. Dozier et al (1995:12) state that two-way symmetrical communication can either be two-way asymmetrical or two-way symmetrical. Through two-way asymmetrical communication publics are persuaded to act in a manner in which an organisation wants them to. On the contrary, two-way symmetrical communication serves as an instrument to develop a win-win relationship between an organisation and its key publics through negotiation and compromise (Dozier et al 1995:13). The latter is a core element of the excellence

theory. Dozier et al (1995:18) further argue that through a shared understanding of the communication function between the dominant coalition and communicators it contributes towards excellent communication programs. The participative culture sphere provides nurturing conditions for excellent programs (Dozier et al 1995:17). Dozier et al (1995:17) contend that organisations who attach value to teamwork, employee involvement in decision making, and flexibility and receptiveness towards environmental demands, are more likely to have excellent communication programs.

Fearn-Banks (2007:57-59) identifies the applicability of the excellence theory in crisis situations by recognising the importance of strong, open relationships with key stakeholders prior to crises, and argues that organisations that apply two-way symmetrical communication will suffer less damage from a crisis.

The reason for focusing on the excellence theory is that it not only serves as a tool for sustainable stakeholder relationship building in order to facilitate an integrated crisis communication (ICC) framework, but simultaneously empowers the communication discipline as an essential strategic function.

1.3.4 Perspectives on crisis

An organisational crisis holds distinct characteristics which is evident in the definitions developed by various theorists, including inter alia, the following: a crisis is unexpected and uncertain (Ulmer et al 2007:7; Venter 1994:211); it threatens the existence of an organisation (Ulmer et al 2007:7; Fearn-Banks 2007:8; Keown-McMullen 1997:4; Chong 2004:43); it is disruptive (Venter 1994:211; Pauchant & Douville 1992:46); it is a non-routine event (Hearle 1993:397; Ulmer et al 2007:7); it is regarded as a triggering event (Fink 1986:15; Keown-McMullen 1997:4); it is perceived as an inability to cope (McMullen 1997:4); and it necessitates a timely response (Keown-McMullen 1997:4).

Based on the above traits, the following definition for a crisis in an organisational context is formulated for the purpose of this study: *A crisis is a disruptive, non-routine event that poses warning signals and has the potential to create an illusion of an inability to cope, which can lead to the demise of an organisation should a timely response not be implemented.*

In the sections to follow, various aspects on crises will be addressed, including a definition of crisis management and crisis communication, an elaboration on the relationship between crisis management and crisis communication, crisis communication and crisis management processes, as well as the reasons for the lack of strategic crisis management and communication.

1.3.4.1 Crisis management

According to Stocker (1997:189), crisis management can be defined as the process whereby strategies are planned and applied in order to avoid or alter the possible impact of crisis events on an organisation. Crisis management forms a vital part of strategic management (Chong 2004:43) and strategic planning (Fearn-Banks 2007:9). In essence, crisis management provides an organisation with a systematic response to crisis occurrences (Darling 1994:4). Crisis management includes crisis communication to various stakeholders, including communication with the media (Ferguson 1999:16; MacLiam 2006:31).

1.3.4.2 Crisis communication

Fishman (1999:348) states that a crisis communication situation involves a set of relationships with various stakeholders within a constantly changing environment and necessitates *effective communication* for maintaining these relationships. For the purpose of this study, crisis communication will not be regarded as a reactive element upon the occurrence of a crisis, but as an integral function throughout the crisis management process. In support of this viewpoint, Grunig et al (2002:146) state that “communication with potential publics is needed before decisions are made by strategic decision makers, when publics have formed but not created issues or crises, and during issue and crisis stages”. This is further affirmed by Fearn-Banks (2007:9) who states that crisis communication is the interaction between an organisation and its stakeholders before, during and after a crisis.

It is important to note that crisis communication with the media is only one element of the crisis communication process, and it is also important to note that the whole crisis communication process must be efficient in order to produce effective communication with the media. The concept ‘media’ “collectively refers to the press, radio, television and film” (Wigston 2001:3). For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on the *news media* (press, broadcasting and television), focusing on current newsworthy information, therefore excluding film. The reason for selecting the news media as focal

point is based on the argument that effective relationships and communication with the news media is one of the most fundamental areas of the crisis management process (Barton 1990:7; Seitel 2007:408).

Besides the fact that organisational crises generate intense media interest (Seeger & Ulmer 2001:370), journalists are also skilled professionals that have the ability to gather information faster than corporate executives (Barton 1990:7). Adams (2000:26) states that the manner in which an organisation communicates with the media during a crisis does not only have an effect on public perception, but also shapes the future relationship with the media. Pollard and Hotho (2006:731) confirm that public opinions and attitudes are shaped on the content and technique of media reporting. Consequently, the importance of *efficient* crisis communication with the media is an inevitable step during the management of a crisis.

Many crisis and communication theorists argue that good media relations is a *continuous* task (Skinner et al 2005:8; Pollard & Hotho 2006:731; Hoggan 1991:3), and that it is not a reactive effort only when publicity is required. Subsequently, it is argued that media relations prior to a crisis will benefit and assist an organisation in resolving a crisis. Based on this, it is necessary to state that the researcher argues that there is a *reciprocal* relationship between crisis management and crisis communication.

1.3.4.3 Relationship between crisis management and crisis communication

Although crisis communication is seen as a reactive step of the crisis management process, for the purpose of this study, it is argued that crisis communication, from an IC perspective, should prevail before, during and after a crisis, thus encapsulating the entire crisis management process (that has proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis management stages). Consequently, crisis communication should be practiced on each stage of the crisis management process, thereby implying that the crisis communication process should also have proactive, reactive and post-crisis communication stages. It is therefore argued that there is a *reciprocal* relationship between crisis management and crisis communication.

1.3.4.4 Crisis communication and crisis management processes

Various crisis communication and management processes was evaluated in order to obtain the key thrusts and to determine whether it has proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis management

stages, which is a key determinant of strategy for the purpose of this study. The latter also guided the development of an integrated crisis communication (ICC) theoretical framework.

The evaluation focused on categorising these processes based on the primary components of a strategic management process posed by Preble (1997:770), namely, strategy formulation (determining the future of an organisation through environmental scanning), strategy implementation (process implementation to ensure the achievement of long-term goals) and strategy evaluation (review and feedback). From this viewpoint, it is evident that strategy formulation can be aligned with proactive action, strategy implementation with reactive action, and strategy evaluation as post-action. Consequently, the crisis processes were categorised as either a predominant proactive, reactive, post-crisis management or a process in which all three stages were applied. The type of communication employed by each, thus one-way or two-way, was critically evaluated which will be discussed in Chapter 3. The following models were evaluated: Meyers and Holusha's process (1986); Fink's stage process (1986); Pearson and Clair's theoretical process of crisis management (1998); Mitroff's stage process (1988); Horsley and Barker's synthesis process of crisis management (2002); Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt's integrated symmetrical process for crisis communication (1996); Preble's integrated crisis strategic management process model (1997); MacLaim's conceptual process for organisational strategies of crisis communication with the media (2006); and Marra's process for crisis public relations (1992).

1.3.4.5 Reasons for the lack of strategic crisis management and communication

Strategic management is often excluded from the crisis communication and management processes. Several reasons have been identified in crisis literature for the above. However, theorists predominantly blame management's unenthusiastic attitude towards crisis management as the primary reason for the lack of crisis strategy. For example, Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996:86) argue that management displays a *laissez-faire* attitude towards crisis management, thus a crisis only receives the necessary attention once it becomes a threat to an organisation's survival. Pearson and Clair (1998:70) contend that management becomes victims of the "failure of success", therefore having the mindset that solutions to problems will emerge as it always have in the past. Pollard and Hotho (2006:724) state that management shows little commitment to the concept of crisis management as they regard it as a worthless activity.

As stated earlier, the lack of viewing communication as a strategic function could also contribute to the lack of strategic crisis communication processes. If the field of communication does not receive the necessary credit as a management function, crisis communication will not be practiced strategically.

1.4. TYPE OF STUDY

This research study will be *exploratory* in nature. According to Babbie (2007:89), exploratory research is essential when the researcher investigates a new or different angle of a phenomenon and usually generates new insights into the particular topic. This is evident in the research as the *strategic* management of crises will be investigated, which, as stated in the research problem, has not widely been applied in existing research and therefore requires investigation. On the contrary, Babbie (2007:89) states that the disadvantage of exploratory research is that it rarely provides satisfactory answers to research questions, though it presents indications to the answers that can be further explored.

As this study required human insights and interpretation facilitated by a case study approach, the research was *qualitative*. It was important to determine whether crisis communication models employed by financial services providers in practice, indeed, contribute towards strategic crisis communication with the media. This was determined through *conversations* with the organisations' communication representatives facilitated by a one-on-one interview and focus group discussion.

Gay, Geoffrey and Airasian (2006:399) contend that the objective of qualitative research is to propose an understanding of an occurrence, process or idea. Qualitative research describes life worlds from the participant's point of view (Flick, Von Kardoff & Steinke 2000:3; Babbie, Mouton, Vorster & Prozesky 2007:278). In contrast, quantitative research refers to the analysis of numerical data to clarify, forecast and/or control particular phenomena (Gay et al 2006:9). Non-interactive methods are therefore utilised as there is little or no interaction with the participants. Quantitative research was not appropriate for this study as the purpose was to obtain *insights* from communication practitioners that have firsthand experience in the management of organisational crises.

1.5. FORMULATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the sub-sections to follow, the research problem and research questions will be addressed.

1.5.1 The research problem

Although various attempts have been made in literature towards the effective management of crises and crisis theorists' efforts to identify aspects that contribute towards ineffective crisis management, limited attention has been given towards the *strategic* management thereof and thus there is a lack of managing crises from an *integrated* perspective. Various scholars who studied crises from a strategic perspective support this argument, for example, Preble (1997:669) argues that the synergistic integration potential between crisis management and strategic management is often overlooked, whilst Pollard and Hotho (2006:723) state "... few attempts have been made to integrate the rapidly evolving crisis management literature with that of strategic management". Shaw et al (2007:559) further emphasise the lack of strategic crisis management by contending that organisations only realise the need for strategic management once an organisation's future is in jeopardy as a result of a crisis.

The need for *integrated crisis communication (ICC)* approaches is evident in research conducted by Shrivastava (1993:33) who argues that *crisis communication* is "fragmented in practice", in that various organisational departments often have different tasks during crisis situations, but due to a lack of task coordination and integration, these tasks become fractional. Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996:82) further state that the majority of organisations display an unenthusiastic attitude towards the implementation of integrated crisis management plans, despite the drastic increase in crisis vulnerability experienced by modern organisations.

Based on these arguments, the following problem statement can be formulated:

To explore whether existing crisis communication processes contribute to strategic crisis communication with the media through an integrated crisis communication (ICC) approach as employed by a South African financial services provider.

The research problem underlines that in order for a financial services provider to communicate effectively with the media during a crisis, the crisis communication process in general has to be

strategic. It is vital to understand that the crisis communication process has to be strategic to communicate effectively with *all stakeholders* (which is in line with IC literature) although the focus of this study is only on the media as a specific stakeholder.

1.5.2 The sub-problems

The following sub-problems are derived from the above research problem:

Sub-problem 1: To theoretically explore the relation of strategic management and strategic communication with the crisis management and crisis communication processes.

Sub-problem 2: To determine the key thrusts of existing crisis communication and management processes, and whether the stages of these processes are proactive, reactive and/or post-evaluative.

Sub-problem 3: To determine whether crisis communication in practice can be proactively, reactively and post-evaluatively applied and categorised as part of the crisis management process in order to contribute towards strategic crisis communication with the media.

Sub-problem 4: To address the need for an integrated crisis communication (ICC) framework in order to contribute towards strategic crisis communication with the media.

In order to address the sub-problems, the following research questions must be answered:

1.5.3 The research questions

Research question 1: What is the relation between crisis communication and crisis management?

Research question 2: What are the similarities between strategic management and communication, and crisis management and communication?

Research question 3: What reasons can be attributed to the exclusion of crisis management and communication from the strategic management process?

Research question 4: Is two-way communication dominant in existing crisis communication and management processes so as to facilitate effective media communication?

Research question 5: Can IC be applied in order to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media?

1.6. METHODOLOGY

Mouton (2002:35) contends that the methodological element refers to the technique researchers employ to study their research objectives. The research method, data collection and interpretation method based on the qualitative platform will be discussed in the following sub-sections.

1.6.1 The research method

For the purpose of this research, the case study research method was employed. Paraskevas (2006:895) states that a case study approach offers a rich, holistic and detailed comprehension of the topic under investigation. The aim of qualitative case studies, according to Flick (2000:147), is the specific explanation or re-enactment of a case. It should, however, be noted that the ‘case’ must be understood in broad terms in which persons, communities and organisations become the focus of a case analysis (Flick 2000:147).

Fouché (2005:272) contends that case study researchers have knowledge of the particular literature prior to conducting the research. Consequently, current crisis communication processes and theories will be thoroughly investigated in the literature review which will create an argumentative platform prior to determining whether crisis communication processes employed *in practice* contribute towards strategic crisis management.

1.6.2 Collection and interpretation of data

Fouché (2005:272) states that “the exploration of the case study takes place through detailed, in-depth data collection methods, involving multiple sources of information that are rich in context”. For the purpose of this study, a one-on-one interview and focus group will be utilised as data collection methods to obtain first-hand insights from the participants.

According to Mouton (2002:135), the process of defining the population is two-fold as the researcher needs to differentiate between the *target population* and the *sampling frame*. The target population can be defined as the totality or group of units to which the researcher wants to generalise the results (Du Plooy 2002:53; Mouton 2002:135). The sampling frame refers to the entirety of all cases from which a sample will be drawn (Mouton 2002:135). The target population of this study includes all the successful financial institutions in South Africa, while the sampling frame will comprise the top 10

financial institutions in South Africa. The latter was obtained from Financial Mail's review of South Africa's top listed organisations for 2008. It included financial institutions from various sectors of the financial industry, including the banking, investment and insurance sectors collectively referred to as '*financial services providers*'. The organisations that formed part of the selection, in ranking order, were Sanlam, Standard Bank Group, Old Mutual Plc, FirstRand, Absa Group, Nedbank, Liberty Holdings, Liberty Group, Investec and Investec Plc (Lünsche 2008:29-30).

Each of these organisations' communication and marketing departments were contacted and a *sample* was constructed based on the feedback obtained. The crisis communication processes and plans employed by the realised sample were evaluated in order to determine whether these methods actually contribute towards strategic crisis communication with the media.

The sampling method can be described as *convenient* based on the accessibility and availability of the institutions. According to Galloway (1997:1) and Gay et al (2006:112), convenience sampling refers to a sample that consists of available participants to partake in the study. The sample can also be regarded as *purposive*, as the focus was on the top 10 *financial* institutions in South Africa, and also because data was specifically collected from *communication* representatives of the realised sample.

A semi-structured one-on-one interview with an employee of the realised sample's communication department, who carries the responsibility of crisis communication, was employed. This was supplemented by a focus group as data collection method. Greeff (2005:296) maintains that semi-structured one-on-one interviews have the advantage of flexibility as it allows the researcher to use an interview schedule with predetermined questions as a framework. Therefore, the interview schedule consisting of open-ended questions, guided the researcher, but allowed the participants to introduce different discussion points which the researcher did not consider (Greeff 2005:296). The questionnaire was divided into categories as identified in the literature review. The one-on-one interview was exploratory, specifically to measure the level of strategy in the crisis communication processes and how stakeholder relationships, if any, are built. To supplement the findings of the interview, a focus group was conducted with 6-10 other communication representatives of the realised sample to measure their crisis communication procedures with the media specifically. According to Du Plooy (2002:180), a focus group normally comprise of 6-12 participants and is designed to obtain various views, feelings, thoughts and values pertaining to a specific research topic (Arnold & Epp 2006:63).

The data obtained from the interview and focus group was analysed using Miles and Huberman's data analysis method (1994). This process can be described as consisting of three synchronised flows of action, namely, data reduction, where the data is reduced in a pre-emptive manner; data display, to reduce the data; and conclusion drawing and verification, where the researcher interprets the displayed data and draws meaning from it (Miles & Huberman 1994:10; Poggenpoel 1998:340).

1.6.3 Feasibility of the study

The sample frame selected imposed difficulty, as the participants were not always willing to participate in the study due to time constraints and the fear of revealing confidential information. Therefore, the realised sampling size obtained from the sampling frame of 10 organisations was limited. Qualitative research is also time-consuming which also justifies the limited sample size.

As the one-on-one interview and focus group discussion were recorded using a dictaphone, prior permission from the participants was required. It was also vital to highlight that the research was conducted for academic purposes and the identity of the participants were protected through anonymity. The data recorded was transcribed by the researcher to reduce costs.

A pilot test was conducted prior to conducting the one-on-one interviews in order to test the efficiency of the interview schedule. The pilot test was conducted with Evan Bloom, a well known crisis communication expert.

The aim of the research was to produce data that were valid and reliable. A *valid* measuring instrument can be described as measuring as it was intended (Babbie 2007:148). Babbie et al (2007:119), Babbie (2007:148), and Walliman (2006:34), state that *reliability* focuses on whether the particular method, if applied recurrently, to the same entity, would generate the same outcome. Therefore, the outcome of this research applying the same research framework has to be developed to produce the same results should the study be repeated.

1.7 ANTICIPATED FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DISCIPLINE OF COMMUNICATION

In this section, the anticipated findings and the main contributions to the discipline of communication will be addressed.

1.7.1 Anticipated findings

The researcher expected to highlight the lack of strategic crisis communication processes based on an in-depth literature review and the evaluation thereof in practice through a case study approach. It was envisaged that this will emphasise the need for an integrated crisis communication (ICC) theoretical framework in order to ensure the effective communication with one of the most important public opinion forming stakeholder groups during a crisis, namely, the media.

1.7.2 Anticipated contribution of the study to the discipline of communication

Besides the proposition of a workable theoretical framework for the study field of crisis communication, this study indirectly raised crisis communication as a strategically managed practice which is an aspect not yet fully accepted in the business world. It was proposed that IC should be employed as a facilitator for strategic crisis communication with the media through sustainable stakeholder relationship building. Therefore, a unique link between IC, excellence theory, and crisis literature was drawn.

Although crisis communication is often regarded as an element of the crisis management process, the study proposes that crisis communication is an integrated and continuous process, thus encapsulating the proactive, reactive and post-evaluative steps of the crisis management model. The importance of effective and strategic communication is raised as a key driver in the crisis management process.

1.8 DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

The various aspects of the research related to the sub-problems and questions will be addressed in the following chapter outline (Table 1.1):

Table 1.1: Demarcation of the study

Chapter	Research sub-problem	Research questions
Chapter 1: Orientation and motivation		
Chapter 2: Strategic crisis communication with the media: an integrated communication perspective	Sub-problem 1: To theoretically explore the relation of strategic management and strategic communication with the crisis management and crisis communication processes from a theoretical perspective.	Research question 1: What is the relation between crisis communication and crisis management? Research question 2: What are the similarities between strategic management and communication, and crisis management and communication? Research question 3: What reasons can be attributed to the exclusion of crisis management and communication from the strategic management process?
Chapter 3: Crisis management and crisis communication processes and theories	Sub-problem 2: To determine the key thrusts of existing crisis communication and management processes, and whether the stages of these processes are proactive, reactive and/or post-evaluative in existing literature.	Research question 4: Is two-way communication dominant in existing crisis communication and management processes so as to facilitate effective media communication? Research question 5: Can IC be applied in order to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media?
Chapter 4: Research methodology		
Chapter 5: Data analysis and findings	Sub-problem 3: To determine whether crisis communication in practice can be proactively, reactively and post-evaluatively applied and categorised as part of the crisis management process in order to contribute towards strategic crisis communication with the media.	
Chapter 6: An integrated crisis communication (ICC) framework for strategic crisis communication with the media	Sub-problem 4: To address the need for an integrated crisis communication (ICC) framework in order to contribute towards strategic crisis communication with the media.	Research question 5: Can IC be applied in order to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media?
Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations for future research		

1.9. SUMMARY

This study aims to accentuate the lack of strategic crisis management and communication as a reason for insufficient crisis management processes in the business industry. The research proposes an integrated crisis communication (ICC) theoretical framework, highlighting the importance of sustainable stakeholder relationships, as an attempt to instil strategic crisis methods in order to facilitate effective crisis communication with the media.

Chapter 2 will focus on exploring strategic crisis communication with the media from an integrated crisis communication (ICC) perspective.

CHAPTER 2: STRATEGIC CRISIS COMMUNICATION WITH THE MEDIA: AN IC PERSPECTIVE

“...strategic crisis preparation is becoming an increasingly important issue as organisations seek to cope effectively with potential crises” (Elsubbaugh, Fildes & Rose 2004:112).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter the purpose of the study is indicated as twofold. The first objective was to determine whether existing crisis communication and management processes contribute towards the *strategic management* of a crisis and effective communication with the *media*. The second objective was to highlight the need for an integrated crisis communication framework to ensure that crisis communication with the media is efficiently and strategically managed.

The aim of this chapter is to elaborate on strategic crisis management and communication processes from an *IC* perspective. The chapter is structured as follows: Firstly, an elaboration on general crisis concepts is provided with specific reference to crisis communication with the media; and secondly, a discussion on organisational stakeholders is presented to highlight the importance of building sustainable stakeholder relationship within crisis communication. As the study builds towards an integrated crisis communication framework for strategic crisis communication with the media, stakeholder relationship building, a key element of *IC*, is viewed as an integral element of this study. Thirdly, a discussion on organisational crises within the financial sector specifically, and the subsequent involvement of the media, is addressed. The possible reasons for the lack of *strategic* crisis management and crisis communication processes will be identified thereafter in order to underline the purpose of this study (which is to explore the lack of strategic crisis processes). Lastly, the concepts of strategic management and strategic communication is contextualised to support the discussion on *strategic* crisis management and crisis communication with the media, and culminates in a discussion on the strategic management process from an *IC* perspective, based on existing *IC* literature.

This chapter addresses the following sub-problem and research questions as stipulated in Chapter 1:

Sub-problem	Research questions
<p>Sub-problem 1: To theoretically explore the relation of strategic management and strategic communication with the crisis management and crisis communication processes from a theoretical perspective.</p>	<p>Research question 1: What is the relation between crisis communication and crisis management?</p> <p>Research question 2: What are the similarities between strategic management and communication, and crisis management and communication?</p> <p>Research question 3: What reasons can be attributed to the exclusion of crisis management and communication from the strategic management process?</p>

2.2 AN ELABORATION ON ORGANISATIONAL CRISES AND RELATED CONCEPTS

This section provides a definition for an organisational crisis from a strategic perspective. Secondly, an elaboration on the concept of crisis management is given. Thirdly, a discussion on crisis communication, followed by the reciprocal relationship between crisis communication and crisis management to stipulate that crisis communication is not only a reactive process, but a critical function that should encapsulate the whole crisis management process is addressed. Lastly, crisis communication with the media is discussed, focusing on the news media during crisis situations, as well as emphasising the importance of building media relationships for successful crisis communication.

2.2.1 Definition of an organisational crisis from a strategic perspective

In chapter one, an organisational crisis was defined as *a disruptive, non-routine event that poses warning signals and has the potential to create an illusion of inability to cope, which can lead to the demise of an organisation, should a timely response not be implemented*. It is vital to note that, for the purpose of this study, the focus is on *organisational* crises and not on physical crises – therefore crises caused by business practices and not by environmental disasters such as a fire.

To emphasise the negative impact of organisational crises, Mitroff, Shrivastava and Udwadia (1987:283) and Elsubbaugh, Fildes and Rose (2004:112) maintain that crises have the potential to incapacitate both the financial structure and reputation of the organisation. Moreover, crises can threaten the strategic objectives of the organisation (Richardson 1994:63) and ultimately the future existence of the organisation (Fearn-Banks 2007:8; Ulmer et al 2007:7; Keown-McMullen 1997:4 & Chong 2004:43). Accordingly, Mostafa, Sheaff, Morris and Ingham (2004:399) argue that crisis management is starting to become an inevitable element to enable organisations to effectively manage the damaging effects of crises.

Based on this, it is argued that crises should be managed on a strategic level due to the destructive effects that organisational crises might impose. In line with the purpose of the study to explore the need for *strategic* crisis management and communication processes, the above definition is altered to highlight the strategic influence of crises. Hence, for the purpose of this study, an organisational crisis from a *strategic* perspective is defined as *a disruptive, non-routine event that threatens the strategic objectives of the organisation, and which requires strategic input to successfully prevent, manage and resolve such occurrences to avoid irreparable damage to the organisational reputation and, as a result, the possible demise of the organisation.*

2.2.2 Crisis management

Constant change, brought about by the crisis-ridden era, requires sufficient crisis management plans (Richardson 1994:65) to ensure organisational survival. In accordance, Verwey et al (2002:29) argue that an organisational crisis is an inevitable occurrence and, according to Boin and Lagadec (2000:185), is becoming more complex, which emphasises the necessity of a strategic crisis management process.

Various definitions of crisis management have been proposed. Fink (1986:18) defines crisis management as “any measure that plans in **advance** for a crisis, any measure that removes the risk and uncertainty from a given situation and thereby allows you to be more in control [own emphasis]”. According to Darling (1994:4), “systematic crisis management creates an **early detection** or warning system [own emphasis]”. Stocker (1997:189) defines crisis management as the implementation of strategies in order to **avoid** or lessen the impact of major occurrences on the organisation. Bennet (2005:10) argues that the core essence of crisis management is **planning**. It is therefore apparent from these definitions that effective crisis management assists organisations to avoid or prevent crisis situations and subsequently serves as a *proactive* function.

Marra (1992:3) further states that crisis management is the function that “puts out the fire”, which includes **controlling** the event. Furthermore, Darling (1994:4) affirms that “in essence, crisis management provides a business firm with a systematic, orderly **response** to crisis situations. This response permits the organisation to continue its day-to-day operations while the crisis is being managed [own emphasis]”. Bennet (2005:10) concurs that the aim of crisis management is to allow the organisation to continue with its routine activities. From this it is evident that crisis management also fulfils a *reactive* function.

Sturges et al (1991:23) state that “the objective of crisis management is to influence public opinion to the point that **post-crisis** opinions of any constituent audience are at least positive, or more positive, or more negative, than beforehand [own emphasis]”. Booth (1993:281) also recognises the importance of post-crisis efforts and states that in order to ensure proper reaction after a crisis it is vital to manage the situation as a **learning system**. Crisis management can therefore also be regarded as a *post-evaluative* function.

Based on this, and for the purpose of this study, it is argued that crisis management should be a process with proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages to ensure the strategic management of a crisis. This viewpoint is supported and can be aligned with various crisis theorists, for example, White and Mazur (1995:203) argue that “crisis management begins with crisis planning, imposes unique demands at times of crisis, and involves managing the aftermath of crisis”; Ulmer et al (2007:370) maintain that crisis management stipulates the evaluation, reaction, alleviation and resolution of crises events; and Evans and Elphick (2005:140) define crisis management as the stage process of the ‘four R’s’, namely, reduction, readiness, response and recovery. This argument also correlates with the viewpoint that a strategic management process should have planning, implementation and evaluation stages, which is addressed later in this chapter.

Subsequently, for the purpose of this study, crisis management is defined as *the threefold process to proactively plan and prepare the organisation for possible crisis situations, to sufficiently and promptly respond to crises and to employ post-evaluative actions in order facilitate learning and prepare the organisation for future crisis events.*

2.2.3 Crisis communication

Williams and Treadaway (1992:57) define crisis communication as the organisation’s response to a crisis situation in an attempt to diminish damage to the corporate image. Fearn-Banks (2007:9) defines crisis communication as “the dialogue between the organisation and its public sector to, during, and after the negative occurrence”. The latter definition supports the viewpoint of this study, which not only recognises the importance of crisis communication throughout the crisis management process, but also emphasises the importance of *dialogue* with stakeholders; thus the utilisation of interactive two-way communication to build sustainable stakeholder relationships. The importance of this relationship building within a crisis context is highlighted by Fishman (1999:348) who says: “a crisis

communication situation involves a dynamic or multi-dimensional set of relationships within a rapidly-changing environment. Effective communication is essential to maintaining a positive relationship with key stakeholders such as employees, customers, suppliers and shareholders”.

Furthermore, Elsubbaugh et al (2004:120-121) state that two-way, open communication between management and employees is fundamental in order to manage a crisis effectively because “effective communication is not a one-way process” (Ulmer et al 2007:39), a sound internal organisational climate should be created through dialogue in order to effectively communicate externally during times of high uncertainty. It is also essential to facilitate two-way communication with external stakeholders to create a forum for feedback in crisis situations. In this process, the combination of internal and external communication is also a key characteristic of IC which is essential for strategic communication, as highlighted previously.

Various crisis theorists regard crisis communication as a reactive function only, for example, Sturges et al (1991:24) maintain that crisis communication involves the interaction with stakeholders during the “breakout stage of a crisis” and Lerbinger (1997:39) state that the majority of the communication decisions have to be made when the crisis takes place. However, some theorists disregard this viewpoint of crisis communication as a reactive function and rather support a proactive approach, as it is argued that organisations will be more prepared to manage and resolve a crisis when effective communication systems are in place and stakeholder relationships and credibility have been built prior to the crisis (Fink 1986:96; Smits & Ally 2003:14). Post crisis communication is also essential because “after a crisis, organisations provide information to stakeholders but also schedule time to listen to their concerns and to answer their questions” (Ulmer et al 2007:39).

Consequently, it is evident that the predominant viewpoint of crisis communication as reactive element will not suffice, as various important functions of crisis communication before and after a crisis situation will be omitted, which makes the crisis communication process incomplete. This viewpoint of an integrated crisis communication approach and stakeholder relationship building is further emphasised by Ulmer et al (2007:35) stating that “effective crisis communication starts long before a crisis hits an organisation and should be part of every organisation’s business and strategic plans. Establishing and maintaining equal relationships with groups and organisations is critical to effective crisis communication”.

2.2.4 The reciprocal relationship between crisis management and crisis communication

In Chapter 1 it is argued that a *reciprocal* relationship between crisis management and crisis communication exists and that crisis communication is built on the crisis management process and encapsulates and connects the stages in this process. Crisis communication is not a predominant reactive effort as is so often argued by crisis scholars, but rather an encapsulating process essential during the proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages of a crisis management process. Because crisis communication with the *media* is a component of crisis communication, it is argued that the whole crisis communication process has to be effective in order to facilitate sufficient communication with the media. This reciprocal relationship between crisis management and crisis communication can be illustrated as follows:

Figure 2.1: The reciprocal relationship between crisis management and crisis communication



2.2.5 Crisis communication with the media

This subsection provides a description on the news media within organisational crises, followed by an elaboration on crisis communication with the media as stakeholder group, specifically highlighting the value of sustainable media relationship building for sufficient crisis communication.

2.2.5.1 The news media and organisational crises

As stated previously, the concept 'media' "collectively refers to the press, radio, television and film" (Wigston 2001:3). This study focuses on the *news media* (press, broadcasting and television) and specifically on current newsworthy information, therefore excluding film. Li (2007:670) argues that the public is dependent on the media for news during crises and sometimes relies on the media for the planning of life (Ma 2005:242). The media's task is to gratify the public's information needs, and as a

result, the media “reports crisis-related news, illuminates relevant issues, influences issue portrayal and proposes solutions” (Schmidt 2006:1).

The media’s judgement of a specific event influences the public’s perception of the organisation under scrutiny (Lerbinger 1997:31; Ma 2005:242; Pollard & Hotho 2006:725). An alarming standpoint is that the media is often pressed for time; thus there is insufficient time to gather and verify the facts before reporting (Scanlon 1978:68; Schmidt 2006:11; Van Tonder 2008) and journalists often turn to unofficial sources for information and their insatiable drive for sensation often leads to disregarding ethical requirements (Schmidt 2006:10). Media reports during crises might therefore be “confused, disorganized, carry conflicting information and contain gross ambiguities and inaccuracies” (Scanlon 1978:68).

Graber (1980:232-235) states that media coverage of crisis events usually have both positive and negative effects, of which the main effects are summarised in the below table:

Table 2.1: Positive and negative effects of media reporting during a crisis

Positive effects of media reporting during a crisis	Negative effects of media reporting during a crisis
Information calms people and lessens uncertainty	It can generate a ambience of fear and panic
A feeling of mutual support is generated among the people experiencing the crisis	Statements can be made during crises which provokes unwise reactions
Media reporting can reassure people that the crisis is under control	Media reporting might stimulate riots

2.2.5.2 The importance of media relationships

In order to build and maintain *effective* media relations, various authors stress the importance to build media relations *prior* to crisis situations to facilitate mutual trust which will increase the likelihood of favourable media reporting (Schmidt 2006:11; Dougherty 1992:62). This can be achieved by being open and honest when providing the media with information (Barton 1990:7; Palumbo 1990:50; Williams & Treadaway 1992:58; Dougherty 1992:61; Venter 1994:224; Lerbinger 1997:32; Seeger & Ulmer 2001:370) and always being available for comment in order to avoid further misappropriation of facts and the development of rumours and suspicion (Palumbo 1990:50; Dougherty 1992:66; Lerbinger 1997:31; Horsley & Barker 2002:409).

According to Fearn-Banks (2007:25), a “spirit of cooperation” must be created with the media. She further emphasises that there are three response options to media queries that can be employed, namely,

acknowledgement of the problem and provision of all available information; providing the available information, but admitting that the organisation does not have all the answers at present but will keep the media abreast on any further developments; or the organisation is currently unable to provide answers but will keep the media informed.

Li (2007:671) maintains that the functions that the media fulfils during a crisis are, among others, to alert the public on predicted disasters, to provide valuable information to all stakeholders, to track the process of recovery, to convey lessons learned for future preparation, to participate in tutoring programs and to define slow-onset difficulties as crises.

Graber (1980:229) argues that there are three stages of media reporting during a crisis which affirms the above functions of the media. During the first stage, the media fulfils the function of primary information source, thus accurately describing what happened to all parties affected by the crisis. The second stage focuses on analysing the situation in a logical manner where plans are devised in order to ensure recovery. The third stage of media reporting overlaps with the preceding stages and the role of media reporting during this stage is to envisage the long-term perspective of the crisis.

As part of pro-active crisis communication to the media, it is vital to know what information the media will look for once disaster strikes. Various crisis and communication theorists (Schmidt 2006:10-11; Fearn-Banks 2007:24; Skinner et al 2005:291; Venter 1994:224) argue that the media will predominantly seek a proper description on the crisis and background statistics; information on the parties affected by the crisis; an explanation of the cause of the crisis; the measures of control that are being implemented to manage the situation and to prevent repetitions; the existence of a warning signal and whether the crisis is a recurrence of a previous situation; as well as the contact details of a person responsible for answering questions and providing updated information.

Fearn-Banks (2007:25) claims that the goal of crisis communication with the media is to gain the public's trust through the media, thus creating a win-win relationship between the media and the organisation, as the media is dependent on the organisation for interesting stories, and in turn, the organisation relies on the media to communicate to the public (Fearn-Banks 2007:25).

From the above discussion it can be argued that a symbiotic relationship with the media has to be established *prior* to a crisis. Furthermore, open, honest and prompt communication *during* a crisis will lead to more accurate media reporting and instil a favourable public portrayal, which can assist the organisation in the *resolution* of the crisis.

Massey (2001:153) states that “organisations share an independent relationship with their internal and external stakeholders; indeed, they rely on one another for survival”. Although this study focuses on the media as stakeholder, the handling of all stakeholders during a crisis, will be elaborated on in the following section to contextualise the focus of the study.

2.3 CRISIS STAKEHOLDERS

The purpose of this study is to propose an integrated crisis communication framework to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media. Therefore, the importance of building strategic stakeholder relationships through two-way symmetrical communication is fundamental to this study, as it is one of the key variables of IC. As stated in the previous chapter, the field of communication should form part of the strategic management process through the contribution of strategic stakeholder relationship building (Grunig et al 2002:143). Although the media as key external stakeholder group is the focus of the study, it is vital to elaborate on building stakeholder relationships with both internal and external stakeholders, as an organisation cannot sufficiently communicate externally if it fails to effectively communicate internally. Moreover, should the organisation fail to successfully communicate with any stakeholder group during a crisis, it could have serious repercussions which might be reported by the media. Conversely, organisational stakeholders will inevitably become aware of a crisis when reported by the media.

In this section, stakeholders will firstly be defined, followed by a discussion on the relevance of managing stakeholders during a crisis.

2.3.1 Defining organisational stakeholders

The terms ‘stakeholders’ and ‘publics’ are often used as synonyms, but Grunig and Repper (1992:125) argue that a slight difference is evident. They maintain that stakeholders refer to the broad category of people, whereas publics are the specific segments under each broad stakeholder category. Although the researcher supports Grunig and Repper’s (1992:125) viewpoint of publics being more specific, the

purpose of this study is not to dissect the stakeholders involved in a crisis, but rather to explore the lack of strategic crisis management and, subsequently, highlight the importance of building sustainable relationships with these groups. The concept 'stakeholders' will therefore be used when reference is made to people that have an interest in the organisation.

Freeman (1984:25) defines a stakeholder as any group of people that has a mutual influential relationship with an organisation. Heath (2008:13) states that it refers to the parties that have a direct interest in the organisation. Furthermore, Freeman (1984:25) states that examples of stakeholder categories are governments, employees, the media, competitors and customers. Fearn-Banks (2007:35) subdivides organisational stakeholders into internal and external stakeholder groups. Internal stakeholders "include all classifications of employees...as well as retirees and stockholders"; external stakeholders refer to all outside people related to the organisation, for example customers, the media, suppliers and trade unions.

Morden (2007:194) further divides external stakeholders into "immediate external stakeholders", which refers to the primary recipients of the organisation's objective, for example customers; and "other external stakeholders", which includes all professional and regulatory bodies in the external environment in which the organisation operates. An organisation should communicate efficiently with all stakeholders during a crisis, starting with the internal publics, which is clear in the following statement: "Internal publics should know about the crisis before external publics do" (Fearn-Banks, 2007:38).

2.3.2 The relevance of managing stakeholders during a crisis

Stakeholders play an important role in an organisation's success (Freeman 1984:25), and effective communication should be utilised to maintain positive relationships with stakeholders during a crisis (Fishman 1999:348; Seeger & Ulmer 2001:370). Without strong relationships with stakeholders, "organisations cannot effectively and efficiently conduct business" (Marra 1992:34). Stakeholders are predominantly concerned with how their interests are positively or negatively affected (Heath 2008:13). As organisations rely on the goodwill of stakeholders for survival (Heath 2008:13), stakeholders must constantly be reminded of how organisational activities influence their interests positively and that the organisation acts in their best interest. Moreover, in order to achieve and maintain this positive ambiance with organisational stakeholders, Ulmer et al (2007:35) suggest that

organisations should cultivate sustainable *partnerships* with stakeholders prior to crises. These partnerships encapsulate IC qualities, as building partnerships is achieved through “open, honest dialogue” in order to arrive at equitable solutions to emerging issues (Ulmer et al 2007:35).

Stakeholders should “be kept in cooperative balance with the organisation” (Lerbinger 1997:330). It is therefore essential to build sustainable relationships with stakeholders, as the absence of these relationships prior to a crisis might cause the communication during such a crisis to be ineffective (Ulmer et al 2007:35).

Besides building sustainable stakeholder relationships, the reputation of the industry in which the organisation operates also plays a pivotal role in the effective management of a crisis. As this study focuses on the *financial* industry, the following section briefly highlights the importance of the financial industry and, in essence, validates the selection of this particular sector for the study.

2.4 ORGANISATIONAL CRISES IN THE FINANCIAL INDUSTRY

Massey (2001:160) argues that “an organisation’s niche width will influence stakeholders’ perceptions of the organisation’s image”. Results of an ethnic study conducted by Arpan (2002:314-339), similarly indicated that the manner in which an organisational spokesperson is received by stakeholders during a crisis, depends partially on the person’s nationality. Based on this research, Diers (2007:5) concluded that an organisation’s reaction to a crisis is largely dependent on the industry in which it operates. Ultimately, the specific industry in which the organisation operates, portrays a certain image that is likely to affect on the organisations that operate within it. Consequently, the image of the *financial industry* as a whole could have an impact on financial services providers’ reaction during a crisis and have an influence on its stakeholders’ perception of the particular organisation.

To accentuate the magnitude of fraud in the South African financial industry, Scott (2002) conducted a study in 2002 which indicated that fraud in the insurance sector alone costs the industry R3 billion annually. These statistics might attach a negative image to the financial industry, which could lead to greater scepticism among the public and ultimately, cause the industry to be a popular reporting topic for the media. Furthermore, Clark, Thrift and Tickell (2004:294) and Squier (2009) notice that the educational level of the financial audience is another reason that can be attributed towards the media’s interest in the financial industry. They argue that the financial audience has become more financially

educated, grew in diversity and is more directly involved in the market than before. This will logically generate more media coverage as the media reports stories of public interest (Fearn-Banks 2007:23). In addition to this, a study conducted by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), a sub-division of the US Census Bureau, indicated that the financial industry is one of the industries most prone to crises (Diers 2007:6). Furthermore, the financial industry is kept under the magnifying glass as financial institutions work with other peoples' money according to Squier (2009).

According to Derek Cooper, from the Nedlack Financial Sector Summit, as reported by Wu (2003:14) and identified by MacLiam (2006:3), "the financial sector is like the oil in an engine. Without oil, the economic engine will function defectively, if at all". Wu (2003:14) further accentuates the vital role of the South African financial industry by arguing that due to South Africa's 80 per cent ownership of the total banking assets of the top 100 banks in Sub-Saharan Africa, it plays a pivotal role in regional economies. It is therefore apparent that due to the impact of the financial industry on the economy, which in turn affects people's existence, the industry is placed under scrutiny from both the public and the media to reveal emerging crises.

As argued previously, a lack of strategic crisis management and communication exists to address these issues, which will be explored in the following section.

2.5 THE REASONS FOR THE LACK OF STRATEGIC CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Various reasons can be attributed to the lack of *strategic* crisis management and communication processes. In Chapter 1, the apathetic attitude of management towards crisis management was highlighted. Similarly, crisis scholar L. Pauchant (Marra 1992:3) points out that the absence of managers in crisis management processes is the predominant reason for crisis management not being embraced to its full potential. Moreover, leaders withdraw themselves from crises as they fear that they might be held responsible for the situation (Ulmer et al 2007:51). CEOs are also accused of having *passive* attitudes towards crises (Barton 2001:212), while crisis management is indeed an *active* and strategic process (Bloom 2008a).

A number of crisis scholars over a wide time span also argue that crisis management is still in its infancy (Mitroff et al 1987:285; Mitroff, Pearson & Pauchant 1992:236; Richardson 1994:62; Mostafa Sheaff, Morris & Ingham 2004:401), which can also contribute to the lack of strategic crisis processes. Preble (1997:780-782) provides a few reasons which might justify the lack of strategic crisis management processes. Firstly, it is argued that the lack of strategic crisis management can be ascribed to earlier failures in the organisation's broader strategic management process. Secondly, to apply strategic crisis management processes, top management must acknowledge the *strategic nature* of crisis management (Preble 1997:780). Thirdly, managers often have the tendency to use contingency plans as a substitute for crisis management processes (Smith 1992:267). Organisational managers therefore believe that they are prepared for crises because they have contingency plans in place. Based on a survey on Fortune 500 organisations, Preble (1997:781) also concludes that successful organisations perceive themselves as being immune to crises. The current business environment also brings about diverse challenges such as mergers, acquisitions, downsizing of employees and global competition which results in crisis management being regarded as a secondary concern.

Verwey et al (2002:33) maintain that "new strategic direction cannot be organisationally intended – it can only emerge from the interactions between people in the organisation and its environment. It succeeds only when it emerges from open dialogue amongst all parties, which accords all people the freedom to collaborate". This statement highlights the importance of employing two-way symmetrical communication with internal and external stakeholders in order to instil strategic direction. Consequently, the absence of two-way communication with internal and external stakeholders could be a reason for the lack of strategic crisis communication processes. Furthermore, the lack of viewing communication as a strategic function could contribute to the lack of strategic crisis communication, because if communication is not viewed as a strategic function, crisis communication will not be practiced strategically.

In summary, a number of diverse reasons contribute to the lack of strategic crisis management and communication. However, the importance of managing a crisis on a strategic level cannot be ignored, as crises threaten the *strategic objectives* of the organisation (Richardson 1994:63; Preble 1997:780), and ultimately, the survival of the organisation.

As this study focuses on facilitating a *strategic* crisis communication process through an integrated crisis communication framework, strategic literature needs to be investigated. Furthermore, to ensure a comprehensive discussion on strategic crisis communication, the various extensions of the strategic concept need to be explored.

2.6 DEFINING STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION THROUGH EXPLORING THE EXTENTIONS OF STRATEGY

This section focuses on providing a discussion on the various extensions of the strategic concept derived from Angelopulo and Schoonraad's (2006:28-33) categorisation to explain the strategic role of communication. As it is argued that there is a reciprocal relationship between crisis management and crisis communication, the section includes a specific focus on strategic management and communication in the below discussion. This section firstly focuses on defining strategy, and then explains the various extensions of the strategic concept, including a discussion on strategic planning, strategic thinking and strategic decision making.

2.6.1 Defining strategy

The term 'strategic' refers to accomplishing goals and resolving issues (Plowman 2005:132). According to Mintzberg (1987:11), "strategy is a plan - some sort of consciously intended course of action, a guideline (or set of guidelines) to deal with a situation". Strategies stipulate how the organisation will implement certain activities within a certain timeframe, in order to achieve the organisational objectives (Morden 2007:184). The basic premise of strategy focuses on the interrelationship between the organisation and its environment – the organisation uses strategy to manage change from the outside (Chaffee 1985:89). This definition is especially applicable to this study as it is proposed that *strategic* processes should be employed in order to successfully manage organisational crises, which indeed brings about change and uncertainty. Furthermore, Mintzberg (1987:11-17) defines strategy in terms of the five p's, namely perspective, plan, pattern, position and ploys. Morden (2007:185) expanded on Mintzberg's concept and added another two p's, power and politics. Each element, as interpreted by Morden (2007:184-185), is described below.

Perspective: refers to the fundamental business idea and the manner in which this idea is practically applied.

- Plan:* plan refers to the map on how to achieve something in the future based on a certain timeframe.
- Pattern:* refers to the constancy of an organisation's decision making over a certain period.
- Position:* is the manner in which the organisation establishes itself in the external environment.
- Ploys:* are competitive strategies aimed at maintaining a competitive advantage for the organisation.
- Power:* refers to the utilisation of both internal and external authority.
- Politics:* refers to the utilisation of lawful political behaviour to further the ground of the organisation, for example, lobbying.

From the descriptions above, we can conclude that (for the purpose of this study) strategy can be defined as *a guideline to establish a healthy interrelationship between the organisation and the external environment in order to ensure the achievement of organisational objectives and the resolution of emerging issues.*

2.6.2 Extensions of the strategic concept

Numerous extensions of the strategic concept are widely applied in literature (Angelopulo & Schoonraad 2006:29). This study focuses on strategic planning, strategic thinking and strategic decision making, with specific emphasis on strategic management and communication.

2.6.2.1 Strategic planning

In an attempt to define strategic planning, various authors argue that strategic planning is a continuing, comprehensive and wide ranging process that ensures long-term organisational survival (Oosthuizen 2007:143); it is a process interlinked with environmental scanning (Wilson 1984:75; Hax 1984:19) and it also focuses on the actions necessary to improve organisational performance (O'Regan & Ghobadian 2002:664). Strategic planning therefore constructs the framework that provides direction for the organisation to achieve objectives and adapt to changes from the environment. However, it is noteworthy that strategic planning alone cannot create the mobilisation of resources and people, and will not produce *strategic thinking*. Planning should be incorporated with other imperative systems such as management control and communication and should further be supported by the organisational structure and culture (Hax 1984:72).

2.6.2.2 Strategic thinking

Strategic thinking is focused on the mutual influential relationship between the organisation and the external environment, and is attentive towards the “interconnectivity between past, present and future” (Angelopulo & Schoonraad 2006:32). As argued by Liedtka (1998:122-123), strategic thinking incorporates five important elements, namely a systems perspective, intent-focused, intelligent-opportunism, thinking in time and hypothesis driven. A *systems perspective* is when a strategic thinker holds a holistic viewpoint of value creation. *Strategic intent* “provides the focus that allows individuals within an organisation to marshal and leverage their energy, to focus attention, to resist distraction and to concentrate for as long as it takes to achieve a goal” (Liedtka 1998:123). *Intelligent opportunism* refers to the possibility of new strategies emerging. Strategic thinking furthermore implies *thinking in time*, therefore planning the future based on past happenings. Lastly, Liedtka (1998:123) argues that the ability to *develop and test a hypothesis* is critical for strategic thinking. Based on these descriptions, strategic thinking refers to committed concentration to achieve a goal which is facilitated through a holistic mindset to identify opportunities based on events in the past.

2.6.2.3 Strategic decision making

Strategic decisions involve a change in direction for an organisation and have an effect on organisational survival (White & Dozier 1992:98). Moreover, strategic decisions require an adequate base of knowledge about the organisation’s environment (White & Dozier 1992:8). In order to highlight the relation between strategic decisions, strategy and strategic thinking, Johnson and Greenwood (2007:20) state that “strategic decisions are made and strategies come about through processes of rational analytical thinking”.

Consequently, it can be concluded that managers must think strategically in order to make strategic decisions that will result in a framework from which strategies can be developed and implemented. For the purpose of this study, it will be argued that the process that encapsulates and monitors these functions is *strategic management* which is highlighted in the following section.

2.6.2.4 Strategic management

Theorists have various perceptions on the concept of strategic management: Grunig and Repper (1992:119) argue that the concepts *mission* and *environment* encompass strategic management

literature, thereby implying that strategic management is concerned with achieving the mission of an organisation in correspondence with managing the relationship of the organisation with its external environment. Booth (1993:62) defines strategic management as the “formulation, implementation and responsibility for plans and related activities vital for the central direction and functioning of the enterprise as a whole”. Plowman (2005:132) states that strategic management is concerned with achieving long-term organisational goals and balancing the mission of the organisation with the influences from external stakeholders.

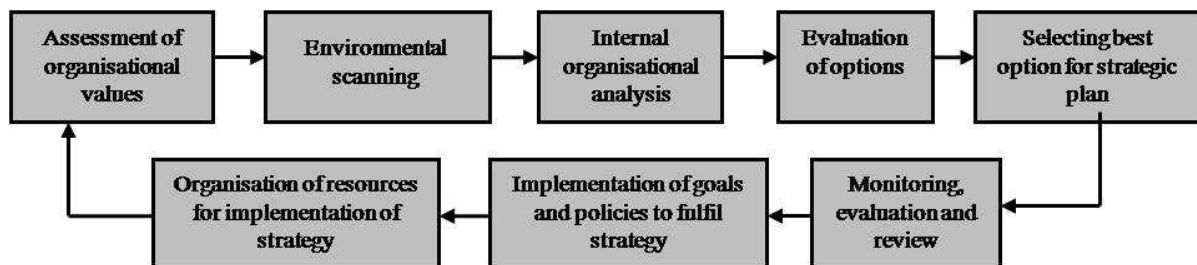
From the above perceptions it can be argued that strategic management encapsulates the key strategic functions of planning, thinking and decision making. In essence, strategic management refers to the management of the whole process from formulating the strategy to evaluation after the implementation of the strategy. Booth (1993:62-63) argues that strategic management is a plan that includes four essential phases:

Table 2.2: Phases of strategic management

Strategic management phase	Description
Analysis of critical issues	The identification of external and environmental issues that might influence the achievement of organisational objectives.
Strategic choice	The rational decision making process which connects the objective of an organisation with the organisation’s potential. This process becomes the strategic plan.
Implementation	All actions implemented in order to achieve the predetermined objectives.
Evaluation and review	The strategic plan is evaluated after implementation in order to identify room for improvement.

As illustrated below, Booth (1993:63) claims that a basic model for strategic management can be designed based on the above mentioned phases:

Figure 2.2: Booth’s basic model of strategic management (Booth 1993:63)



The above phases and model correlates with the proposed proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages of the crisis management process, as there are phases of preparation and planning, action and evaluation and review. It can therefore be argued, that in order to facilitate *strategic* crisis management, the process has to possess proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages.

- Levels of strategic management

Various business theorists recognise that strategic management occurs on different levels (Hill & Jones 1989:18; Pearce & Robinson 1988:8-10; Steyn 2003:172). These levels predominantly include corporate, business and functional:

Strategy at *corporate level* is the responsibility of top management (Angelopulo & Schoonraad 2006:33), which includes the CEO, senior executives, directors and corporate employees and is predominantly concerned with ensuring a healthy financial performance for the organisation (Pearce & Robinson 1988:8; Hill & Jones 1989:19; Steyn 2003:173).

According to Hill and Jones (1989:19), the *business level* comprises the managers of different departments responsible for translating the statements made at corporate level into functional strategies for each department (Pearce & Robinson 1988:8). Business strategies are predominantly marketing orientated in order to build and preserve a competitive advantage (Angelopulo & Schoonraad 2006:33; Steyn 2003:173) and the focus is to support the financial objectives of the organisation (Steyn 2003:173).

On the functional level managers must develop annual objectives and short-term strategies that represent key functions in the organisation such as finance and marketing (Hill & Jones 1989:20; Pearce & Robinson 1988:9). Usually there are no strategic managers occupying this level (Hill & Jones 1989:20), but the functional strategy should be directed in order to support the other levels of strategic management (Steyn 2003:173).

As stipulated by Steyn and Puth (2000:41-45) and Steyn (2003:172,174) and also recognised by Angelopulo and Schoonraad (2006:33), two other levels of strategic management exist, namely *enterprise* and operational level. Steyn (2003:173) contends that the enterprise level is the broadest level of strategy that focuses on achieving non-financial related objectives, such as building the

organisational image. More importantly, Steyn (2003:173) states that strategy on enterprise level should be *stakeholder* orientated: “At the enterprise level, the organisation’s reputation should be managed, its values be determined and sound corporate governance principles be adopted. This will ultimately lead to the organisation being trusted by its stakeholders as well as being regarded as legitimate and socially responsible by society at large”. This level is of particular importance in the proactive crisis management stage, as a good reputation prior to a crisis would assist the organisation in managing and resolving the crisis more successfully. Moreover, sustainable relationships with the media as key stakeholder would result in more effective communication with the media and, in essence, more favourable reporting towards the organisation in a crisis. At operational level, strategies are converted into action (Steyn 2003:174) and is characterised by the maximisation of resource productivity through the exploitation of the organisation’s core proficiencies. Operational strategies are vital in order to manage operating units economically (Steyn & Puth 2000:45).

“Effective communication is essential to the success of every organisation...a series of communication strategies is essential for effective crisis communication” (Barton 2001:62). In the next section, the importance of strategic communication is highlighted.

2.6.2.5 Strategic communication

According to Argenti, Howell and Beck (2005:83), strategic communication can be defined as “communication aligned with the organisation’s overall strategy, to enhance its strategic positioning.” The below discussion will focus on describing the function of communication within an organisation, highlighting the relationship between strategy and communication and also addressing lack of strategic communication.

- The function of communication in an organisation

Communication is the adhesive that connects the individual elements of an organisation, allowing interaction with key stakeholders (Angelopulo & Schoonraad 2006:3). Furthermore, it is argued that the achievement of organisational objectives and total functioning of the organisation are largely determined by its *communication* (Van Riel 1995:2; Angelopulo & Schoonraad 2006:3). According to Van Riel (1995:2), the role of communication is to conduct a *mirror* and a *window* function. The *window function* refers to the preparation and implementation of communication policies to depict all elements of an organisation in a logical manner. This instils the necessary changes in the target groups

with which the organisation aims to build and preserve relationships. This facilitating role establishes an active outward orientation, thereby creating the organisation's grounding to facilitate *mutual understanding* with key stakeholders (Steyn & Puth 2000:19). Conversely, the *mirror function* refers to scanning the environment for new developments and foreseeing the possible consequences that these developments might have on the communication policy. This function is vital for the organisation's strategy, as the communicator's role here is to act as an early warning system in order to resolve issues before they develop into crises (Steyn & Puth 2000:19).

Another crucial function identified by Steyn and Puth (2000:18) is that corporate communication practitioners also need to fulfil the important function of *boundary spanners*, which refers to their functions as information gatherers and processors. It also highlights their ability to function on the edge of an organisation, thereby acting as liaison between the organisation and its stakeholders. The boundary spanning, mirror and window functions are all fundamental in contributing to the strategic management process (Steyn & Puth 2000:18-19).

White and Mazur (1995:179), Ristino (2001:33) and Grunig et al (2002:15) emphasise the importance of practicing two-way symmetrical communication, as opposed to one-way communication. Two-way symmetrical models of communication "balance the interests of the organisation with its publics, are based on research, and uses communication to manage conflict with strategic publics" (Grunig et al 2002:15). Two-way symmetrical communication therefore creates long-term relationships with stakeholders (Grunig et al 2002:15). One-way communication focuses on communicating the interests of the organisation with the absence of dialogue (Grunig et al 2002:308). Dozier et al (1995:41) contend that in one-way communication models, communication flows in one direction, from the organisation to the media, and from the media to the public. For the purpose of this study, it is argued that two-way symmetrical communication should be practiced to build sustainable relationships with the media in order to facilitate effective and strategic crisis communication.

It is therefore evident that communication has essential functions in an organisational context with the predominant part of these functions, as identified in the previous section, being *strategic*. Communication has a stakeholder relationship-building function, it plays a vital role in achieving organisational objectives, in the normal functioning of the organisation and it assists the organisation in identifying changes in the external environment. To further contribute towards the necessity of

practicing strategic communication, the relationship between strategy and communication is elaborated on in the following section.

- The relationship between strategy and communication

In an attempt to highlight the significance of communication in the strategic management process, Moss and Warnaby (1998:133-137) state that it is essential to distinguish between *strategy communication* and *communication strategy*:

a) Strategy communication

There is a need to communicate the CEO's strategic vision both internally and externally; "strategy-making processes will inevitably rely on effective communication to help ensure a consensus within the organisation as to the strategic problems and issues faced and appropriate methods for their resolution" (Moss & Warnaby 1998:135). Accordingly, Verwey (2003:3) states that communication should be viewed as a strategic process, thereby contributing to the achievement of organisational objectives and long-term sustainability. Strategy communication therefore focuses on the *role* that communication fulfils in the process of strategy (Angelopulo & Schoonraad 2006:34).

Various authors recognise the role of *strategic* communication. Through the application of boundary spanning and environmental scanning, strategic communication enables an organisation to proactively adapt to changes in stakeholder expectations. Secondly, as a result of early recognition, the management of issues and the participation of stakeholders in the decision making process, creates a competitive advantage for the organisation (Steyn 2003:180). The corporate communication strategy makes communication pertinent in the process of strategic management through the alignment of the organisational mission with the objectives of the organisation (Steyn 2003:180). Besides identifying and building sustainable relationships with the organisation's stakeholders and developing communication programs to resolve their issues, communicators provide strategic information to integrate into the strategy formulation process and thereafter recommend appropriate action (Steyn & Puth 2000:17). Long-term stakeholder relationship building is regarded as the communication discipline's core contribution towards strategic management (Grunig & Repper 1992:117; Likely 2003:19).

Besides the above roles, Likely (2003:19-22) further states that the communication function also plays the following roles throughout the strategic management process: Adjacent to stakeholder relations, the function can contribute corporate reputation research and intellect to the strategic management process, thereby fulfilling the role of *overseeing* and *integrating*; the communication function provides vital information on internal organisational happenings, therefore fulfilling an *advocacy* role; communication strategists protect organisational values, relationships, reputation and the brand through *visualising end-results*, stipulating the paths to achieve the intended outcome and identifying possible consequences; it also fulfils the role of *change agent* and *problem solver*; the communication function can review the need to address revised stakeholder segments, relationships and behaviours and upon implementation of the strategy, the public relations / communication function will *evaluate* the performance in corporate reputation, stakeholder relations, communication programs, communication products, communication channels and function management.

b) Communication strategy

Grates (1995:19) and Cabot and Steiner (2006:64) contend that a communication strategy can only be effective once it is integrated with the overall business strategy. Similarly, Angelopulo and Schoonraad (2006:36) regard the composition of a communication strategy as one of the strategic roles of communication, as it contributes towards the success of the organisational strategy in its totality. Ristino (2001:34) proposes a stakeholder focus in defining a communication strategy. He states that a communication strategy emphasises stakeholders' perceptions of the organisation and how these perceptions will be amended, reinforced or neutralised. A communication strategy hence provides a framework against which continuing corporate communication decisions are measured and it evaluates and questions the decisions taken by the corporate communication function (Steyn & Puth 2000:52).

The lack of practicing strategic crisis communication can be aligned with this study's exploration of a lack of strategic crisis communication processes, and is addressed in the following section.

- Addressing the lack of strategic communication

The management of change, which is an essential requirement for successful crisis management, is often ineffective as communication is not regarded as a *strategic* function (Moss & Warnaby 1998:131; Grobler 2003:186; Steyn 2003:168). This can be ascribed to communication practitioners fulfilling a *technical* function within an organisation, thereby implementing the decisions of others as opposed to

fulfilling a *managerial* role, whereby practitioners should contribute toward strategy formulation (Steyn & Puth 2000:9). In a study focusing on measuring the demand for strategic communication in organisations, Potter (1998:14) states that “communicators need to become business managers who specialise in organisational communication”. To achieve this, communicators must familiarise themselves with strategic planning principles, among other things (Potter 1998:17), which implies an understanding of what the organisation does, an evaluation of the environment in which the organisation operates and how organisational objectives will be achieved.

Public relations or corporate communication is predominantly regarded as a *functional* strategy (Grunig & Repper 1992:121; Steyn 2003:174). As stated in Chapter 1, crisis management is a task associated with public relations or corporate communication. It can therefore be argued that the lack of *strategic* crisis management could be ascribed to the absence of public relations on business, corporate and enterprise levels, as identified in the previous section. Steyn (2003:178) further concludes that “corporate communication’s contribution to the organisation’s strategy formulation processes lies in its inputs into, and participation in, the formulation of enterprise and functional strategy”. Corporate communication should support the corporate and business strategy, but should not contribute to the formulation thereof (Steyn 2003:178). Corporate communication fulfils the most important role in the strategic management process on *enterprise level* (Steyn 2003:179; Niemann 2005:5), as it facilitates building sustainable stakeholder relationships which provide direction for the organisation’s communication (Steyn 2003:179).

Consequently, to be strategic, corporate communication or public relations should contribute towards the *formulation* and *implementation* of strategic management on enterprise and functional levels. Although corporate communication does not play a dominant role in the strategy formulation on corporate and business levels, it should still support these levels. Therefore, corporate communication should form part of the total strategic management process, although the degree of importance and role on each level of strategy will vary.

To further the argument, Argenti et al (2005:88-89) state that for communication to be practiced strategically, the following aspects, inter alia, need to be implemented. Firstly, senior managers must be involved in the communication process. This implies that all top managers must practice communication strategically with all stakeholders and understand the importance of communication.

Secondly, which is a core focus of this study, is that communication should be *integrated*. This will enable harmonisation of communication messages. Thirdly, communication must have a long-term orientation, which highlights the importance of practicing *proactive* rather than reactive communications. The latter also emphasise the significance of this study’s argument that crisis communication should, among others, be proactive – which is achieved through building relationships with stakeholders. Lastly, which is a reverse argument of the first aspect, is that top communicators must also have management skills. Communicators need to ‘speak the same language’ as senior executives.

White and Mazur’s (1995:170) viewpoint summarises the essence of this discussion: “Communication is a fundamental process in **management** and needs to be approached with more commitment and a willingness to recognise its requirements [own emphasis]”. The predominant functions that communication can provide on strategic level, based on the above research, is stipulated in the table below (Steyn & Puth 2000:145; Grunig & Repper 1992:118):

Table 2.3: Key elements of communication that contribute towards strategic management

Communication element	Contribution to strategic management
Sustainable stakeholder relationship building (which will contribute towards achieving the organisational mission and objectives)	The utilisation of two-way symmetrical communication will assist the organisation in detecting changes in stakeholder expectations. Through the utilisation of dialogue, a climate of credibility is created which results in a positive image for the organisation. Strategic stakeholder relationship building can assist the organisation to function more effectively and to achieve the mission of the organisation. This element includes the boundary spanning role (liaison between the organisation and the environment) and the window role of communication (which facilitates the grounding to build mutual understanding with stakeholders).
Early detection of issues (external)	As communicators have a close relationship with stakeholders and a solid knowledge of the external environment, they are aware of emerging issues that might pose a threat to the survival of an organisation. These issues are therefore proactively identified before it evolves into a crisis. This element also represents the mirror role of communication, in which the communicator fulfils the role of an early warning system.
A clear understanding of internal organisational happenings	Communication practitioners carry valuable insight of everyday organisational happenings. Consequently, internal issues can be resolved before it affects the normal functioning of the organisation. A sound internal climate is always necessary to build a stable organisational image. This also signifies the boundary spanning role in which the communicator fulfils the role of information gatherer and processor.
Resolution of problems through research	By utilising research as a tool for the strategic management of communication, communicators can understand the cause of the problem and an appropriate communication plan can be developed to resolve this problem. Research also facilitates planning, testing and evaluation qualities. Communicators are also in constant contact with stakeholders, therefore more information regarding problems can be obtained from stakeholder interaction.

The remainder of the chapter focuses on strategic crisis management and strategic crisis communication, emphasising strategic crisis communication with the media through the application of *IC*.

2.7 STRATEGIC CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Crises are inevitable, which highlights the importance of preparing and managing crises on a strategic level (Mostafa et al 2004:399). Moreover, as crises may threaten the survival of an organisation, Mitroff and Pearson (1993:116) argue that ‘crisis prepared’ organisations recognise the importance of involving top management in crisis management processes and even argue that crisis management can be used as a tool for obtaining a competitive advantage. Pauchant and Mitroff (1992:126) state that managers in crisis prepared organisations have the perspective that “crisis management concerns the totality of the organisation as well as their relation with their environment and is an expression of the organisation’s fundamental purpose or strategic vision”. Sheaffer and Mano-Nergrin (2003:575) maintain that crisis preparedness refers to the ability of an organisation to consciously recognise and proactively prepare for a crisis situation. *Crisis proneness* is the exact opposite of the previous state, leading to “negligent corporate vulnerability and organisational downturns” (Sheaffer & Mano-Nergrin 2003:576). Crisis preparedness is similar to *strategy* as it also provides a framework of goals that have to be accomplished during a crisis situation (Sturges et al 1991:22). In accordance, the ability of the organisation to move from crisis prone to crisis prepared depends on the extent to which the organisation is able to integrate the crisis management process with the *strategic management* process (Elsubbaugh et al 2004:116; Pollard & Hotho 2006:726).

Smits and Ally (2003:5) claim that organisational leaders can approach crisis management preparedness as a proactive choice closely related to strategic planning. By utilising internal evaluation and environmental scanning, leaders can detect issues of concern as well as develop an organisational policy that supports crisis management to ensure organisational survival. Crisis management preparedness should also be integrated with strategic planning to ensure that it receives continuous attention (Smits & Ally 2003:5).

According to Richardson (1994:60), a key task of the strategic manager is to have the ability to intuit future events based on past and present happenings. This *anticipatory knowledge* is vital for the

strategic crisis manager, as it assists the organisation to identify issues before it evolves into crises (Richardson 1994:60).

Preble (1997:774) argues that the differences between strategic management and crisis management create an opportunity for integration which is facilitated by the similarities between these two fields. The similarities that exist between strategic management and crisis management are set out in Table 2.4 below (Meyers & Holusha 1986:205; Mitroff et al 1992:237-245; Pauchant & Mitroff 1992:129-130; Preble 1997:774-776):

Table 2.4: Similarities between strategic management and crisis management

Characteristic	Description
Environmental relations <i>A focus on the external environment</i>	Although strategic management primarily holds an <i>outside-in</i> environmental perspective (scanning the environment for opportunities and threats), and crisis management follows an <i>inside-out</i> environmental perspective (measuring of an organisation's impact on the environment), both fields are concerned with changes from the external environment. An open systems perspective is instilled in order to identify changes from the external environment.
Complex set of stakeholders <i>The involvement of a wide array of stakeholders</i>	Even though crisis management is often concerned with different stakeholder groups as opposed to strategic management, both fields have to work with complex stakeholder groups, each with a different frame of reference. Therefore, both crisis management and strategic management involves diverse stakeholder groups.
Top management involvement	The involvement of top management is a key necessity for both fields. Although top management's involvement is a logical prerequisite for crisis management, it is often absent, as the focus of this study indicates, which results in inefficient crisis management efforts.
Concern for the organisation in totality	Strategic management is concerned with the management of the organisation in totality. In essence, crisis management aims to manage crises that might impose a threat to all levels of the organisation; therefore, crisis management is also concerned with the wellbeing of the entire organisation.
Consistent pattern <i>Processes that have similar elements and are conducted continually</i>	Strategy formulation is consistent as it is concerned with patterns of happenings in the past in addition to emergent happenings. Crisis managers build on the consistency of an organisation, namely the organisation's identity, which can also relate to whether the organisation is crisis prone or crisis prepared. Crises are also emergent, either imposed by the environment or as a result of organisational members' decisions or actions.
Demonstration of evolving processes <i>Long- term organisational survival</i>	Both the fields of crisis management and strategic management have developed models which involve formulation and implementation qualities, with processes that can be applied continuously. The implementation and formulation qualities result in crisis management and strategic management being concerned with the long-term survival of the organisation.
Involving change	Both strategic planning and crisis management involves change; crisis management focuses on moments of instability that must be managed prior to reaching strategic objectives. This highlights a supplementary relationship between strategic planning and crisis management.

In line with the study's argument that the crisis management process should have proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages, Shrivastava and Mitroff (1987:8) argue that the strategic management of organisational crises has to be concerned with *prevention* and *coping*. In order to ensure effective crisis management, it is argued that it should mainly be implemented on corporate and business levels as discussed earlier.

On *corporate level*, crisis management should be concerned with reducing the possibility of a crisis occurrence through preventative measures (Shrivastava & Mitroff 1987:8-9). Preventative measures include: a) A *business portfolio* which is created to achieve a predetermined return on investment and a certain level of growth. This process often includes the utilisation of technology and aorganising technological risks; b) *Technology portfolios*, which reduces these risks by means of a business portfolio matrix in which the crisis potential of technologies are measured against the quality of the environmental infrastructure that sustain the organisation; c) *Crisis audits* scan each area of the organisation for possible failures and serves as an early warning system that should be communicated to top management in order to implement the necessary corrective action; and d) A *crisis management team* will assist the organisation in managing and responding to a crisis. However, Shrivastava and Mitroff (1987:9) point out that these teams must include a wide array of expertise, for example medical, legal, technical, public relations related and financial.

On the *business level*, strategies should be aimed at providing careful attention to avoid internal and external interactive failures to the business environment by testing product vulnerability and initiating a culture of safety and vigilance, cooperative solutions at industry level and implementing community relations (Shrivastava & Mitroff 1987:10-11). Each product and facility should be analysed in terms of *vulnerability* in order to identify possible causes of breakdowns in technological and social systems. Furthermore, the safety levels of the organisation can be enhanced through a culture of safety and *vigilance* through continuous inspection. Shrivastava and Mitroff (1987:10) claim that certain crises might be applicable to the industry in which the organisation operates as a whole in which joint efforts on industry level could be the solution. *Community relations* implies that the public must be informed about the crisis, as an informed public is better equipped to deal with a crisis.

Pollard and Hotho (2006:724) maintain that crisis management should involve a group of managers as opposed to being the responsibility of one individual or department, which will bring about various

strategic advances. The next section highlights the relevance of practicing strategic crisis communication with the media.

2.8 STRATEGIC CRISIS COMMUNICATION WITH THE MEDIA

In a conversation Fink (1986:93-94) had with Lawrence G. Foster, Johnson and Johnson's corporate vice president, Foster stated that "the single most important thing for a communicator in a crisis is immediate access to authority...and the second most important thing for a communicator in a crisis is to have authority himself". Various authors, including Palumbo (1990:47) and Zerman (1995:28), argue that the spokesperson for a crisis management team has to be a member of senior management, claiming that authority is required in order to make important decisions, since the organisation's reputation could be tarnished by inaccurate media reporting in the event of a crisis. Crisis communicators should have the expertise and experience to liaise with the media, therefore their contribution on strategic level is indispensable. Furthermore, Zerman (1995:25) points out that the commitment of senior decision makers to the entire corporate disaster management plan, including a crisis communication program, is required to ensure feasibility. In order to obtain management support, Zerman (1995:25) argues that the importance of communication must be highlighted continuously. An organisation must be prepared for all possible crises and must efficiently communicate during a crisis. Consequently, by implementing these aspects, senior management will realise the worth of (crisis) communication on a strategic level.

As indicated by Lerbinger (1997:39), public relations or corporate communication's main contribution is liaising with the media and building stakeholder relationships, with the objective to manage or circumvent damage to the organisation's image. These functions are all vital for organisational survival and should therefore be conducted on a strategic level. The ideal is therefore that crisis communication should be a continuous activity, by which formal strategic procedures are utilised to effectively and proactively respond to a crisis (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt 1996:101).

As emphasised previously, communication, specifically crisis communication, has to be regarded as a strategic function in order to successfully manage and resolve a crisis. In Table 2.3 the key elements of communication that contribute towards strategic management were identified. The applicability of each of these elements to crisis communication is discussed in Table 2.5 below (Steyn & Puth 2000:145; Grunig & Repper 1992:118):

Table 2.5: Key elements of communication that contribute towards strategic management and the applicability thereof in crisis communication

Communication element	Contribution to strategic management	Applicability to crisis communication
Sustainable stakeholder relationship building (which will contribute towards achieving the organisational mission and objectives)	The utilisation of two-way symmetrical communication will assist the organisation in detecting changes in stakeholder expectations. Through the utilisation of dialogue, a climate of credibility is created which results in a positive image for the organisation. Strategic stakeholder relationship building can assist the organisation to function more effectively and to achieve the mission of the organisation.	Prior relationships built with key stakeholders will assist the organisation in managing and resolving the crisis more sufficiently. The reputation of the organisation will suffer less if the organisation is perceived as credible prior to the crisis. Media reporting will also be more favourable towards an organisation with a good track record as opposed to a tarnished record.
Early detection of issues	As communicators have a close relationship with stakeholders and a solid knowledge of the external environment, they are aware of emerging issues that might pose a threat to the survival of an organisation.	Issues of concern are often detected early, which enables the organisation to resolve these issues before it evolves into reputation threatening crises. Crisis communicators become familiar with warning signals, and thereby also serve the function of an early warning system.
A clear understanding of internal organisational happenings	Communication practitioners carry valuable insight of everyday organisational happenings. Consequently, internal issues can be resolved before it affects the normal functioning of the organisation. A sound internal climate is always necessary to build a stable organisational image.	A solid knowledge of internal organisational happenings is vital in order to successfully resolve a crisis. Furthermore, communicators can easily detect whether internal elements contribute towards the crisis, thus whether the crisis is organisationally imposed.
Resolution of problems through research	By utilising research as a tool for the strategic management of communication, communicators can understand the cause of the problem and an appropriate communication plan can be developed to resolve this problem. Research also facilitates planning, testing and evaluation qualities. Communicators are also in constant contact with stakeholders, therefore more information regarding problems can be obtained from stakeholder interaction.	Research can be utilised in order to determine the cause of the crisis as well as to develop, implement and evaluate action plans employed. Crisis communicators can also gather more information regarding an issue through stakeholder interaction.

Caywood (1997:xi), states that "...PR provides a new level of leadership for management to **integrate relationships** inside as well as outside the organisation using a wide range of **management strategies and tactics including communications** [own emphasis]". Since crises necessitates extraordinary effort to identify and communicate with all relevant stakeholders (Cowden & Sellnow 2002:195), building sustainable stakeholder relationships, as highlighted by Caywood, is probably the most important function that crisis communicators fulfil on strategic level. Moreover, the crisis communicator should specifically develop a *spirit of cooperation* with the media (Fearn-Banks 2007:25), which is facilitated through two-way symmetrical communication; a key characteristic of *IC*.

As stated earlier in the chapter, the management of change, often brought about by crises, cannot be conducted efficiently without practicing communication on a strategic level. This study proposes that IC should be implemented to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media. The remainder of the chapter defines and explores the nature of IC as a solution for the absence of *strategic* communication, which is affirmed by Duncan and Caywood (1996:32), who state that *integration* implies the recognising communication as a vital part in the *total management process* by contributing to *relationship building*. The main argument is that the application of an IC approach to instil strategic crisis communication is crucial for strategic crisis communication with the media.

2.9 INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION (IC)

The following sections focus on defining and explaining the evolution of IC as well as highlighting the drivers, the key building blocks and various models of IC.

2.9.1 The evolution of IC: from IMC to IC

Aberg (1990:13) called for a more strategic, synergised approach to communication, which implies that “all the various forms of task orientated and organisation orientated communication within an organisation are integrated to support the achievement of the organisation’s aims and goals”. Van Riel (1995:1,9) contends that communication is gradually obtaining the status of a management tool, since organisations increasingly depend on communication for success. There is an enhanced realisation among organisations that the separation of internal and external communication activities will no longer suffice, as it creates a fragmented impression which can damage the corporate image (Van Riel 1995:8). In order to avoid the dangers of fragmented communication, all internal and external communication must be harmonised. Similarly, Gronstedt (1996:291) claims that the practice of public relations and marketing communication as separate functions has historic rather than operational value. He argues that there is room for integration between public relations and marketing communication as the *tools* and *markets* of these two disciplines overlap.

This study follows the stance that IC evolved from its predecessor, integrated marketing communication (IMC), as proposed by various authors like Niemann (2005:77), Grunig et al (2002:270) and Gronstedt (2000:8). Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the latter and highlight the evolutionary differences between the two concepts.

Consumers became more educated and selective, which led to the emergence of IMC. Various attempts have been made to define the concept of IMC, for example: Kitchen and Schultz (2000:64) define the concept of IMC as “a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable persuasive brand communication programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects and other targeted, relevant external and internal audiences”. Although this definition does recognise the strategic contribution of communication through the proposition of planning, implementation and evaluation literature (which is characteristic of a strategic process) the main limitation might be that it does not focus on building relationships, but rather on delivering a one-way *persuasive* message.

Another definition is proposed by Van der Westhuizen (2001:3), who defines IMC as: “a concept of communication planning that recognises the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines – for example, general advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing, public relations, sponsorship and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact”.

This definition highlights the value of strategic communication through integrating various communication tools in order to optimise communication, but also does not recognise the value of two-way symmetrical communication in order to build sustainable relationships. Similarly, Pelter, Schibrowsky and Schultz (2003:93) also highlight the use of combining communication tools by defining IMC as a comprehensive marketing plan that evaluates a wide array of communication disciplines.

Furthermore, Du Plessis (2003:10) argues that IMC is the ability to select the most appropriate manner to convey the marketing communication, packaged as a consistent and unified message to the marketplace and highlighting a specific theme and positioning. This definition also underlines the integration of various communication principles, as stipulated by Van der Westhuizen’s (2001:3) definition, to deliver a consistent message. Grove, Carlson and Dorsch (2007:38) argue that IMC can be regarded as a ‘circular communication process’ in which communication with consumers are studied to enable the organisation to accurately target similar future communication endeavours.

Various communication theorists criticised IMC by arguing that although it is a concept that has great potential, it produces implementation difficulties as it requires organisation-wide changes and cross-

functional support in order to be successful (Duncan & Moriarty 1997:xiv); it focuses on one-way communication messages instead of two-way communication (Hartley & Pickton 1999:101); it is regarded as an insufficient step towards the concept of IC as it only supports communication agencies' determination for more business (Gronstedt 2000:8); there is confusion as to whether IMC is a tool designed to support advertising and public relations or whether it is a communication discipline in its own right (Grunig et al 2002:270).

IC on the other hand is seen as a “cross-functional process for managing profitable brand relationships by bringing people and corporate learning together in order to maintain strategic consistency in brand communications, facilitate purposeful dialogue with customers and other stakeholders and market a corporate mission that increases brand trust” (Duncan & Moriarty 1997:9). Furthermore, Gronstedt (2000:8) defines IC “as the strategic management process of facilitating a desired meaning of the organisation and its brands by creating unity of effort at every point of contact with key customers and stakeholders for the purpose of building profitable relationships with them”. Both these definitions accentuate the importance of facilitating *dialogue* with all stakeholders to instil profitable stakeholder relationships and emphasise the importance of total organisational buy-in in the communication process, thereby highlighting it as a strategic, cross-functional management process.

Recently, IC has been defined as “the notion and the practice of aligning symbols, messages, procedures and behaviours in order for an organisation to communicate with clarity, consistency and continuity within and across formal organisational boundaries” (Christensen, Firat & Torp 2008:424). This definition highlights the importance of message consistency in order to communicate efficiently with all stakeholders. The definition of IC that encapsulates the core of this study, although not the most recent definition, is developed by Niemann (2005:30) as “the strategic management process of organisationally controlling or influencing all messages and encouraging purposeful, data-driven dialogue to create and nourish long-term profitable relationships with stakeholders”. This definition correlates with the focus of this study as it can be argued that IC is applied to facilitate a strategic crisis communication process through an approach that promotes the utilisation of two-way communication to build sustainable media relationships.

In order to further define IC, the predominant differences between IMC and IC for the purpose of this study, as proposed by Niemann (2005:27-28), are summarised in the table below:

Table 2.6: The differences between IMC and IC

IMC	IC
Predominantly customer focused	Focuses on all stakeholders; thus it is a more holistic approach
The focus is on messages <i>sent</i>	The focus is on two-way communication
External message orientated	Integration of internal and external messages
The marketing or communication department drives the messages of the organisation	The strategic objective of the organisation drives all the communication of the organisation
Contributes to the technical aspects of the organisation	IC is strategic in nature, contributing to the strategic thinking processes of the organisation

From the above table it is evident that IC focuses on building *sustainable relationships* with all stakeholders through *two-way communication*. *Message consistency* is also vital within IC as internal and external messages need to be integrated and aligned with the strategic objective of the organisation as a whole.

2.9.2 IC drivers

Duncan and Moriarty (1997:xv) state that IMC should be replaced with *integrated marketing*, which requires management's support and dedication, an integrated organisational structure and communication that is not only focused on sending messages, but also on listening to stakeholders. Although Duncan and Moriarty's research is applied to marketing specifically, Angelopulo (2006:48) argues that it could be applied to IC specifically, as these drivers are centred on communication, and proposes an in-depth process for aligning the organisation's operations with product and service delivery that will satisfy stakeholder's needs. The ten strategic drivers of IC are highlighted below (Duncan & Moriarty 1997:15-19):

Creating and nourishing relationships: Organisations should focus on retaining customers through credible communication in order to build sustainable relationships with them.

Focusing on stakeholders: The organisation should not just focus on building relationships with customers, but to build profitable relationships with all stakeholders as there is a mutual influential relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders (Freeman 1984:25).

Strategic consistency: It is argued that the consistency of an organisation's identity and reputation is largely determined by the extent to which the brand is strategically integrated into all messages (Duncan & Moriarty 1997:17).

Creating purposeful interactivity: Feedback and dialogue should be facilitated with all stakeholders to ensure a higher level of stakeholder integration into an organisation's planning and operations. Therefore, the norm should be to 'listen and learn' as opposed to 'tell and sell'.

Organisational mission marketing: The organisation's mission should be integrated into all activities. Stakeholders have an additional reason to support an organisation when the organisation's mission is not just focused on profit making (Duncan 2002:31).

Zero-based planning: Zero-based communication planning is focused on justifying all communication objectives and strategies in relation to the actions that have to be implemented in order to manage relationships more sufficiently.

Cross-functional departmental planning and monitoring: Expertise within the organisation should be integrated, in which experiences and meaning are shared. Therefore, organisational departments should interact consistently.

Creating core competencies: Strengths and weaknesses of communication functions should be managed in order to optimise cost-effectiveness in each function.

Integrating agencies: A communication management agency coordinates an organisation's total communication program. Barker and Du Plessis (2001:3) maintain that in order to ensure organisational survival, organisations have to redefine communication structures through the integration of communication activities.

Building and managing customer databases: Personalised communication can only be facilitated through the implementation of a program to build and use databases, as "information is the bloodstream of the organisation" (Duncan & Moriarty 1997:19).

These drivers will be used as important *variables* for the integrated crisis communication framework, proposed in this study.

2.9.3 The key building blocks of IC

The predominant building blocks of IC identified in the literature which supports this study are: stakeholder centricity; the combination of internal and external communication; two-way communication; and a strategic communication process (Gronstedt 1996:294; Gronstedt 2000:15; Duncan 2002:126; Niemann 2005:8).

2.9.3.1 Stakeholder centrality

The general discussion on organisational stakeholders provided earlier indicated the importance of stakeholder centrality and how it pertains to IC. As highlighted in the discussion above, IC focuses on all stakeholders, not just customers as is the case with IMC, specifically because the twenty-first century is characterised by stakeholder integration, which is built on a foundation of *two-way symmetrical communication* (Niemann 2005:8).

Gronstedt (1996:294) points out that organisational stakeholders are all interdependent; changes in one stakeholder group tend to have a domino effect on other stakeholder groups. IC is constructed around this interdependency through coordinating the entire network of stakeholders' communication activities (Gronstedt 1996:295). In accordance, Steyn and Puth (2000:190) maintain that stakeholder management is mutually beneficial. Organisations that include stakeholders in their decision making processes will carry a competitive advantage, and stakeholders are more satisfied when given the opportunity to interact and to initiate discussions (through the utilisation of two-way symmetrical communication) which simultaneously produce higher stakeholder loyalty and a differential advantage for the organisation.

In a recent study on the strategic value of sustainable stakeholder relationship building, Jagersma (2009:341) argues that stakeholder focused organisations utilise information gathered to serve stakeholders more effectively; stakeholder *partnerships* are fostered; these organisations display enthusiasm to treat stakeholders differently and their competitive advantage is driven by *understanding* stakeholder behaviour and identifying manners to serve stakeholders more efficiently. To achieve the latter, the key is to "shape and guide stakeholder *dialogue*" to build sustainable relationships (Jagersma 2009:342). This specifically highlights the importance of utilising two-way communication to build stakeholder relationships. It also correlates with an earlier argument by Bussy, Watson, Pitt and Ewing (2000:139) stating that "it is by *communication* with stakeholders that the organisation shapes and forms relationships with them". For the purpose of this study, it is argued that IC should be applied to facilitate sustainable relationships with the media to communicate effectively during a crisis.

2.9.3.2 The combination of internal and external communication

To avoid fragmented communication, which can have a negative impact on an organisation's image, Van Riel (1995:3) suggests harmonising internal and external communication messages. Gronstedt

(2000:15-18) proposes a three-dimensional model for integrating communication in which he proposes that IC needs to take place right through the organisation (external integration), ranks (vertical integration) and functions (horizontal integration). These dimensions of integration encapsulate the combination of internal and external communication:

External integration; external communications: Profitable relationships are created through the integration of communication at every stakeholder contact point. Everyone in the organisation has a dialogical relationship with stakeholders and apply what they learn to better satisfy the needs of these stakeholders.

Vertical integration; vertical communications: This level of integration implies connecting the frontline workers, who are in direct contact with stakeholders, with top management, who has the authority to act on the information obtained from frontline workers' interaction with key stakeholders. Two-way communication is thus facilitated among senior management, middle management and employees.

Horizontal integration; horizontal communications: This dimension implements the cross-functional, cross-business and cross-border communication processes, and integrates communication between people working at different business levels, units and departments.

Integrating communication on all three dimensions will ensure sustainable stakeholder relationship building, in which issues that may result in crises, could easily be detected and resolved. Furthermore, it will ensure effective internal communication in order to deliver sufficient external communication during crises. Building on the latter argument, Stephens, Malone and Bailey (2005:391,398) state that, as a broad number of internal and external stakeholder groups need to be addressed during a crisis, *message consistency* is key as it will contribute towards building organisational legitimacy and trustworthiness. Welch and Jackson (2007:188) argue that the goals of internal communication, among others, are to develop a realisation of *environmental change* and an understanding of the necessity for the organisation to develop its objectives *in response to environmental change*. The latter objectives highlight the need for alignment between internal and external communication, which is especially applicable to crises which bring about organisational change.

2.9.3.3 *The facilitation of two-way communication*

Grunig and Grunig (1992:289) state that the two-way symmetrical model of communication uses research in order to facilitate understanding and communication as opposed to the mere identification of messages in order to influence or inspire stakeholders. Gronstedt (1996:295) maintains that the integration of communication requires dialogue by which “stakeholders are recognised as receivers as well as senders of information...[A]n integrated stakeholder approach calls for pretest and post-evaluation of all stakeholders that will encounter a communication activity, including stakeholders that do not constitute the primary target audience”. This is made possible through the application of two-way communication. For both the organisation and stakeholders to benefit, meaningful communication, facilitated through two-way communication must be practiced (Ristino 2001:33).

The integrative utilisation of receiving, interactive and sending tools will instil a dialogue in which the stakeholders are active, interactive and equal participants of a continuing communication process to create sustainable relationships (Gronstedt 1996:297). The facilitation of two-way communication evident in the IC model implies that the source and receiver constantly trade places, as people initiate contact and receive messages from the organisation (Duncan 2002:126). To further highlight the relevance of two-way communication, Argenti, Howell and Beck (2005:87) argue that stakeholder *feedback* determines the success of the communication and overall business strategy.

2.9.3.4 *Strategic communication process*

IC is a strategic communication process, thereby implying that communication should permeate through the entire organisation (Gronstedt 2000:8) which means that communication is driven by the *strategic intent of the organisation as a whole* (Niemann 2005:28) and not by the communication or marketing department’s individual strategies. Similarly, Argenti et al (2005:83) argue that a strategic communication process, such as IC, ensures alignment with the organisational strategy as a whole in order to enhance strategic positioning. The integrated perspective of communication implies that communication should be regarded as a *philosophy of doing business*, not just an organisational function (Duncan & Moriarty 1997:xii). This will however, as argued earlier, necessitate the involvement of senior managers in the communication process and communicators having general management skills (Argenti et al 2005:88).

The above building blocks are also interrelated, as a stakeholder focus will initiate dialogue between the organisation and stakeholders, while a strategic management process implies that the communication process must permeate through the entire organisation, thereby building on the concept of internal and external communication integration. Furthermore, Gronstedt (2000:8) states that in order to build profitable stakeholder relationships, all contact with stakeholders must be strategically integrated.

These building blocks and drivers highlighted in section 2.9.2, will be utilised collectively, in conjunction with the characteristics of the excellence theory to form the *key variables* (as outlined in the Figure 3.2.2, the strategic crisis communication mind map) for an integrated crisis communication framework.

2.9.4 The implementation of IC

Various communication theorists have developed IC implementation models, for example, Gronstedt's (1996:291) integrated model, Caywood's (1997:xiv) public relations process integration model Duncan and Moriarty's (1997:243) IC agency model and Kitchen and Schultz's (2000:87) integrated global marketing communication strategy model to name a few. Based on these models, Niemann (2005:239) developed a South-African model that addresses the shortcomings evident in these models. This model is the most recent endeavour in developing an IC implementation model, and will therefore be used for the purpose of this study. However, as the focus of this study is not on how to implement an IC approach in the organisation, but rather on how to instil an integrated crisis communication framework to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media, the essence of this model will only be discussed briefly (Niemann 2005:239-260) in order to contribute towards a comprehensive discussion on IC:

2.9.4.1 Niemann's conceptual model of IC in South-Africa

Niemann (2005:247) states that the model is based on two main principles: the strategic intent (long term organisational plan) of an organisation, which drives IC; and learning organisation principles which continuously reposition the organisation. The first principle highlights that the communication and business objectives of the organisation have to be built on the organisational mission. Niemann (2005:247) argues that the utilisation of the mission as prominent driver in the strategic intent, builds sustainable brand relationships. The second principle emphasises that in order to position the

organisation according to environmental needs, learning organisation principles have to be applied. A learning organisation creates a strategic thinking environment through knowledge sharing in order to create actions that contribute to the organisational interests in totality (Niemann 2005:247). The model further proposes three areas of integration, namely organisational integration, stakeholder integration and environmental integration:

- **Organisational integration** should be implemented first, as internal integration should be achieved prior to external integration (Niemann 2005:248). This level of integration is based on horizontal and vertical integration as proposed by Gronstedt's (2000:15-18) three-dimensional integration model discussed previously. Horizontal integration entails the "*integration and alignment across business units, functions and regions in terms of systems, process, procedures and communication*" (Niemann 2005:249). Vertical integration focuses on integrating communication between different departments, units and countries. Organisational integration involves two sub-levels of integration namely CEO or top management integration and the renaissance communicator. *CEO or top management integration* implies that the mission of the organisation should be continuously communicated to the lower levels of the organisation and a simultaneous awareness of communication on top management level. The CEO is therefore regarded as the organisational integration initiator (Niemann 2005:250). The idea of the *renaissance communicator* is based on the notion that, due to constant environmental changes, there is a need for a different approach to communication in order to instil strategic organisational communication management (Niemann 2005:250). The renaissance communicator provides solutions to important organisational problems which therefore necessitates a strategic approach to communication. The renaissance communicator can also contribute towards erasing the perception of communication as a technical function as discussed earlier in the chapter.
- **Stakeholder integration** is the second area of integration focusing on the organisation having a broader outlook in terms of the environment and the people that have an interest in the organisation (Niemann 2005:255). Therefore, this level of integration highlights the move from a customer focus to stakeholder centricity. It emphasises two sub-levels of stakeholder integration, namely, interactivity integration and brand contact integration. *Interactivity integration*: This integration focuses on the notion that communication should be two-way and purposeful and personalised. As stated earlier in the chapter, two-way communication is focused on generating understanding and

dialogue as opposed to the mere dissemination of information to motivate or persuade. Interactivity integration implies that the media can be used to simultaneously send messages efficiently and receive messages from stakeholders in order to create sustainable *purposeful dialogue*, which holds a mutual benefit for the stakeholders and the organisation (Niemann 2005:257). *Brand contact integration*: Brand contact points represent the circumstances in which the stakeholders could be exposed to a brand message. This level of strategic integration implies the recognising, prioritising, determining cost control messages and identifying additional contact points of the brand. Niemann (2005:258) states that brand contact integration is based on three key ideas: *the message and incentive delivery system must be appropriate for stakeholders*, which implies that the organisation must understand stakeholders before effective messages can be developed; *continuing dialogue facilitates a 360-degree brand idea*, which highlights that through continuous stakeholder interaction the organisation will learn more about the stakeholders' needs through a 360-degree brand idea, implying that the organisation must be single-minded about the outcome it wishes to achieve and neutral towards the ways of implementation; and *timing of messages should be based on stakeholder references*, taking stakeholder preferences into account.

- ***Environmental integration*** implies that the organisation is functioning in an open system. Organisations have to know what is happening in their environments in order to survive. More importantly, organisations have to be able to adapt to change (a characteristic of an organisational crisis) in order to survive.

2.10 SUMMARY

This chapter focused on highlighting the importance of *strategic* crisis communication with the media from an IC perspective. An elaboration on organisational crises and related concepts were provided, followed by a discussion on the relevance of managing stakeholders during a crisis, with specific focus on the media as external stakeholder group. As the study explores the lack of strategic crisis communication processes, it is vital to determine the reasons for the lack of strategic crisis communication processes. Supplementing the latter, strategic management and communication was defined to enable the researcher to provide a comprehensive discussion on strategic crisis management and communication with the media. An IC approach was proposed to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media.

It was argued that crisis management and crisis communication has a reciprocal relationship, thereby implying that crisis communication connects and encapsulates the crisis management process which has proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages. These stages of the crisis management process correlate with a strategic management process, which often possesses planning, implementation and evaluative actions. As crisis communication encapsulates these stages, it should be practiced before, during and after a crisis – it is thus not only a reactive element upon the emergence of a crisis. Based on this argument, a strategic crisis communication process should also possess the stages mentioned above.

The lack of strategic crisis management and crisis communication were ascribed to various reasons, including, among others, management's apathetic attitude towards crisis management, the perception that crisis management is still in its infancy, top management's inability to realise the strategic nature of crisis management, absence of two-way communication with stakeholders and the lack of managing communication as a strategic function.

The need for strategic crisis communication with the media was emphasised as the literature indicated that public opinion is often formed based on media reporting. Furthermore, the literature review also highlighted that the financial industry specifically is a sensitive industry and thus always has the media nearby to report on organisational issues.

It was highlighted that the most important function that crisis communicators contribute on strategic level is sustainable stakeholder relationship building. Based on this, a *spirit of cooperation* has to be established with the media to decrease the possibility of negative reporting. The necessity of cultivating sustainable stakeholder relationships, facilitated through two-way communication, is vital for an organisation to survive a crisis.

It was further suggested that IC could be applied in order to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media, as IC is a *strategic management process that organisationally controls or influences all messages and encourages purposeful, data-driven dialogue to create and nourish long-term profitable relationships with stakeholders.*

The next chapter focuses on defining the proposed proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages of the crisis communication process. Various existing crisis processes and theories is analysed to evaluative whether it is strategic, by firstly determining whether it possesses proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages, and secondly, to establish whether two-way or one-way communication is utilised, since two-way communication is required to contribute towards sustainable media relationship building.

CHAPTER 3: CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION PROCESSES AND THEORIES

“Crisis management begins with crisis planning, imposes unique demands at times of crisis, and involves managing the aftermath of crisis.” (White & Mazur 1995:203).

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explores the application of IC literature in order to facilitate *strategic* crisis communication with the media. The integration of communication implies the recognition of communication as an integral part of the *total management process* through sustainable stakeholder relationship building (Duncan & Caywood 1996:32).

Various authors such as Preble (1997:770) and Booth (1993:62-63) emphasise that a *strategic management process* possesses planning, implementation and evaluative phases. Furthermore, Kash and Darling (1998:180) claim that “today’s successful organisations are characterised by the ability to adapt by recognising important environmental factors, analysing them, evaluating their impact and reacting to them. The art of strategic planning (as it relates to crisis management) involves all of the above activities. The right strategy, in general, provides for preventative measures, and treatment and resolution efforts”. Pollard and Hotho (2006:726) also argue that a strategic process consists of strategic implementation, formulation and evaluation areas. This study builds on these viewpoints and argues that to facilitate strategic crisis management, the crisis management process should include all three stages (proactive, reactive and post-evaluative). The practice of such a process mirrors the planning, implementation and formulation, as well as evaluation qualities of a strategic management process. As argued in the previous chapter, a reciprocal relationship between crisis management and crisis communication exists. Therefore, it could be argued that the strategic crisis *communication* process should also have proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages.

This chapter firstly provides a clarification on terminology, as various terms have unique definitions for the purpose of this study. Secondly, a strategic crisis communication mind map is provided to highlight the aspects necessary for strategic crisis communication and the development of an integrated crisis communication framework. Thirdly, the crisis management process, with specific reference to the three stages, will be discussed to support the discussion and categorisation of existing crisis management and

communication processes. Fourthly, the predominant crisis theories will be elaborated on, with a core focus on Grunig’s excellence theory, as it is proposed that the principles of this theory are most likely to create an environment for strategic crisis communication. Lastly, existing crisis management and communication processes will be analysed to determine whether these processes are strategic. It should be noted that, although the focus is on crisis *communication* processes specifically, various crisis *management* processes is also evaluated, since crisis communication in the literature is regarded as an element of the crisis management process. However, the predominant part of the analysis of these processes is contributed towards the existence of crisis communication in the process.

The chapter will aim to address the following sub-problems and research questions:

Sub-problems	Research questions
<p>Sub-problem 2: To determine the key thrusts of existing crisis communication and management processes, and whether the stages of these processes are proactive, reactive and post-evaluative.</p>	<p>Research question 4: Is two-way communication dominant in existing crisis communication and management processes to facilitate effective media communication?</p> <p>Research question 5: Can IC be applied in order to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media?</p>

3.2 CLARIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGY AND THE STRATEGIC CRISIS COMMUNICATION MIND MAP

For the purpose of this study, various terms are uniquely utilised. This section focuses on highlighting the meanings of these terms, and secondly, provides a mind map to present a definition and outline necessary for a strategic crisis communication process.

3.2.1 Terminology

The key terms that underline this study are defined in the table below to ensure a correct interpretation of each. Simultaneously these definitions contribute towards a better understanding of certain arguments.

Table 3.1: Clarification of terminology

Concept	Definition for the purpose of this study
Stage	There are three stages within a strategic crisis management process namely, proactive crisis management stage, reactive crisis management stage and post-evaluative crisis management stage. Within each stage, there are various actions that should be implemented. However, as the focus of this study is only to propose a framework for strategic crisis communication, these actions are not discussed in detail.
Reciprocal relationship between crisis management and crisis communication	Crisis communication is a function of the crisis management process. However, crisis communication should not be regarded solely as a reactive function – it should be practiced throughout the crisis management process. Therefore, crisis communication should be practiced proactively, reactively and post-evaluatively correlating with the stages of a strategic crisis management process.
Crisis communication being an ‘encapsulating’ process	In line with the previous argument, crisis communication is an encapsulating process, thereby enclosing and connecting the various stages of the crisis management process. It is thus practiced proactively, reactively and post-evaluatively.
Strategic crisis <i>management</i> process and strategic crisis <i>communication</i> process	For the purpose of this study, a strategic crisis management process is regarded as a process with proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis management stages. These stages are derived from theorists’ arguments that a strategic management process requires these stages. Their existence is therefore a key determinant of a strategic crisis management process. This principle could also be applied to a strategic <i>communication</i> process, since there is a reciprocal relationship between crisis management and communication. Thus based on this and the previous argument, a strategic crisis communication process should also have proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages.

3.2.2 A mind map for strategic crisis communication

Based on the literature, the following aspects are necessary for strategic crisis communication with the media and the development of an integrated crisis communication framework. Figure 3.1 does not only display the sequential evolvement of one aspect to the next, but also clarifies certain concepts.

Figure 3.1: A strategic crisis communication mind map



3.3 THE STRATEGIC CRISIS MANAGEMENT PROCESS

It is necessary to discuss the strategic crisis management process with specific reference to the three stages of the process, as existing crisis management processes and theories will be evaluated against these stages. As the focus of this study is only to propose an integrated crisis communication *framework*, the actions that need to be employed on each stage is only briefly discussed below, with a more detailed elaboration attached as Addendum A. However, as the focus lies specifically with the practice of crisis communication, specific reference will be made to crisis communication on each stage in the discussion that follows.

It was argued that a strategic crisis management process consists of a proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis management stage and can be defined as *the threefold process to **proactively** plan and prepare the organisation for possible crisis situations; to sufficiently and promptly **respond** to crises*

and to employ post-evaluative actions in order to facilitate learning and prepare the organisation for future crisis events.

3.3.1 The proactive crisis management stage

“Crisis preparedness involves creating a crisis plan, designating crisis management teams, training employees to respond during a crisis, and amassing resources to address a crisis. This process is akin to strategy, in the sense that it provides a framework of objectives to be accomplished in the event of a crisis” (Sturges et al 1991:23). Various theorists maintain that organisations that implement proactive crisis communication will have crises of shorter duration and decisions will also be better received and more sensible (Maynard 1993:54); it will assist the organisation to control and resolve a crisis (Kash & Darling 1998:100); it can assist the organisation to reduce response time and may prevent possible mistakes that could emerge during the organisation’s response to a crisis (Benoit & Pang 2008:252); and it can assist the organisation to avoid the crisis altogether (Bloom:2008a). Consequently, it is evident that proactive crisis management enables the organisation to detect burning issues that could lead to a crisis and, should a crisis emerge, assist the organisation to better manage and resolve the crisis.

3.3.1.1 Proactive crisis communication

Heath and Millar (2004:6) state that proactive crisis communication fulfils two important functions: it firstly searches for possible crises and reduces the probability that it will emerge, and secondly, it prepares key stakeholders for a crisis in order to ensure the crisis will be controlled when it takes place. According to Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996:85), proactive crisis communication “suggests openness to, and cooperation with the publics before an issue matures into a crisis”. This represents two-way symmetrical communication, an important element of IC, in order to build strategic stakeholder relationships. Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996:85) further argue that proactive, two-way symmetrical communication with stakeholders can lessen the risk of a crisis emerging and should a crisis surface, the organisation will have a better chance of being perceived as innocent. In order to be proactive during crisis situations, “communication programmes need to be strategically and continually retooled” to meet fluctuating environmental and organisational demands (Fall 2004:247). The following need to be considered during proactive crisis communication:

- Risk communication

Marra (1992:45) emphasises the need to distinguish between *risk communication* and *crisis communication*. Risk communication is the task of notifying and educating stakeholders about possible risks. Marra (1992:45) claims that risk communication differs from proactive crisis communication as risk communication builds mutual relationships between the organisation and stakeholders, whereas crisis communication is employed to *maintain or reinstate* these relationships. Therefore, he argues that risk communication should be employed *prior* to crisis situations, while crisis communication should be employed *during* crisis situations. As the study regards crisis communication as a process to be employed before, during and after a crisis, the researcher does not support Marra's viewpoint. However, risk communication and crisis communication could collectively be viewed as an intertwined process.

- Media liaison

The media is an important external stakeholder, but as it is the core focus of the study, it will be discussed separately from the general stakeholder relationships section. Venter (1994:213) maintains that "a crisis, by its very nature, elicits extraordinary media attention and because of the influence of the media on other publics, the news media has become one of the most important publics with whom effective communication must be developed". As stated in the previous chapter, a win-win relationship between the media and the organisation has to be established prior to crisis situations through the utilisation of open, honest dialogue (thus two-way symmetrical communication). In order to distribute information quickly during a crisis, the accessibility of media contact details should form part of the crisis management plan (Pollard & Hotho 2006:731).

- Stakeholder relationships

Sturges et al (1991:23) highlight the importance of proactive stakeholder relationships by stating that damage control may be too late to save stakeholder relationships. As argued previously, organisations rely on the goodwill of stakeholders for survival (Heath 2008:13). Therefore, proactive relationships must be established with internal and external stakeholders through the utilisation of two-way symmetrical communication, in order to generate a solid foundation of trust and loyalty.

From the above discussion it is evident that the proactive crisis management stage is an inevitable stage in the crisis management process, as it will assist the organisation to resolve issues before it evolves into a full-blown crisis. Proactive crisis management facilitates sustainable stakeholder relationships which also ensure more sufficient crisis management and resolution. If all actions of the proactive crisis management stage is adequately implemented and developed, the organisation will be able to deliver prompt feedback when reacting to the crisis.

3.3.2 The reactive crisis management stage

According to Bloom (2008a), the first hour after a crisis occurs is the *golden hour* in which an organisation has the best opportunity to address the issue prior to negative media reporting. The organisation has to respond immediately, accept responsibility, restore credibility, go the extra mile, be tolerant and display empathy when experiencing a crisis (Vermeulen 2003:12). Prompt reaction after a crisis also avoids the development of rumours (Diers 2007:17; Bloom 2008a).

3.3.2.1 Reactive crisis communication

Diers (2007:8) argues that during the reactive stage, crisis communication focuses on dealing with the media and developing crisis communication tools. Furthermore, reactive crisis communication further implies formulating messages to key stakeholder groups, acquiring third-party support, communicating internally and managing rumours (Diers 2007:8). The following need to be considered during reactive crisis communication for the purpose of this study:

- Communicating with stakeholders

All stakeholders are entitled to have all the facts regarding the crisis (Fearn-Banks 2007:25). Argenti (2002:104) accentuates the importance of internal communication by stating that “in a time of extreme crisis, internal communication take precedence. Before any other consecutive action can take place – whether it is serving customers or reassuring investors – the morale of employees must be rebuilt”. Employees are very sensitive towards media reporting, therefore, as stated by Rob Densen from Oppenheimer commenting on the 9/11 attack, the organisation has to express their functionality through the media (Argenti 2002:106). Internal stakeholders should be aware of the crisis prior to external stakeholders (Fearn-Banks 2007:38). Besides the news media, organisations must use special tools such as letters, informing external stakeholders about the crisis, in order to preserve loyalty (Fearn-Banks 2007:41). It is essential that the organisation itself informs all stakeholders about the

crisis, as news from third parties might create the perception that the organisation is trying to withhold critical information (MacLiam 2006:46).

- Communication with the media

After developing the response strategy, the message must be communicated to the media in order to avoid misappropriation of facts and the reporting of incorrect perceptions. As stated in Chapter 2, the media often performs an opinion forming role among organisational stakeholders which underlines the importance of effective communication with the media. In an argument of ethical responsibility, Guth and Marsh (2003:171) state that the spokesperson or public relations practitioner, when communicating to stakeholders, must be trained to maintain a healthy balance between *objectivity* and *advocacy*, therefore not revealing too much information (objectivity) to bring the organisation under jeopardy, but at the same time not being unethical by revealing too little information (advocacy). The focus, however, should always be to act for “the good of the relationships that sustain the organisation” (Guth & Marsh 2003:173). This is also applicable when communicating with the media during times of disaster. The spokesperson should act in the stakeholders’ best interest to maintain sound relationships and simultaneously serve the organisation. Furthermore, as argued in Chapter 2, the organisation must always be open and honest when providing the media with facts and also be available for comment in order to avoid the misappropriation of facts. “Cover-ups make a crisis persist...when you release your own bad news, you decrease the likelihood of rumour, supposition, half-truths, and misinformation” (Fearn-Banks 2007:24).

- Reactive communication channels to get the message across

Argenti (2002:105) and Fearn-Banks (2007:36) highlight the significance of a communication channel during a crisis situation to ensure that the information reaches the desired stakeholders in the projected manner. Communication channels include “mass media, advertising, internet, editorial boards, organisational activism and third party channels”, with the mass media and internet being the most popular (Diers 2007:17). As stakeholders are affected by organisational crises, they will often seek information. Therefore, the organisation must utilise the most appropriate communication channel to disseminate information. Fearn-Banks (2007:38) advises that the best channel to communicate continuously with internal publics is the intranet, as it “allows the organisation to communicate only to its own people”.

As stipulated in the above discussion, the response during a crisis will determine whether the organisation is able to successfully resolve the particular crisis and also whether it affects the organisation's reputation negatively or positively. The interconnectedness between the proposed stages of crisis management is also evident, as the preparation conducted during the proactive crisis management stage will have an effect on the organisation's response during the reactive crisis management stage. The efficiency of the organisation's feedback during the reactive crisis management stage will also determine the intensity of the post-evaluative crisis management stage.

3.3.3 The post-evaluative crisis management stage

White and Mazur (1994:211) state that post-evaluative crisis management could imply rebuilding the reputation of the organisation and regaining stakeholders' trust. Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996:100) state that during the post-evaluative crisis management stage, organisations must continue to address issues of concern raised by stakeholders. The issue should be closely monitored until it is fully resolved, the organisation must inform the media of its actions, crisis plans should be re-evaluated to identify strengths and weaknesses and sustainable symmetrical communication programmes have to be developed to decrease damage caused by crises. An essential part of post-evaluative crisis management is to show how organisations will avoid such occurrences from happening in the future (Heath & Millar 2004:8). According to Meyers and Halusha (1986:27-38), there are several potential advantages of a crisis. These advantages can be identified in the post-evaluative stage of crisis management and applied in the proactive stage of the next crisis. The advantages are summarised below.

Heroes are born: New leaders are often identified during the aftermath of a crisis. Talented people are able to break through the lines of bureaucracy and show their worth. Thus, a crisis changes a conventional order and thereby allows talent to arise.

Change is accelerated: A crisis brings about change. As the contemporary business environment is characterised by constant change and requires organisations to adapt in order to survive, a crisis forces the organisation to function during times of uncertainty. It will therefore enable the organisation to operate more sufficiently during times of constant flux.

Latent problems are faced: A crisis forces the organisation to address problems that would normally have been ignored.

People can be changed: A crisis will allow organisations to make sufficient human resource modifications to ensure that each employee fulfils the correct position.

New strategies evolve: A crisis forces the organisation to re-evaluate established organisational plans. The crisis management plan has to be reconsidered in order to identify room for improvement.

Early warning systems develop: Once an organisation experienced a crisis, avoidance of future disasters becomes crucial. Early warning systems are then developed to detect signs of trouble.

New competitive edges appear: An organisation that survives a crisis is usually more mature and stronger than prior to the crisis. A crisis has the tendency to create an *esprit de corps* among crisis survivors, which will result in a stronger, more inspired work force.

3.3.3.1 Post-evaluative crisis communication

According to Dougherty (1992:69), after a crisis the interaction with the media has to be evaluated. Some of the questions that have to be answered are: Which strategies worked and which strategies failed? How much coverage did the crisis receive? Was the reporting favourable towards the organisation? Were rumours or inaccurate information published?

Ulmer et al (2007:131) propose post crisis communication discourse of *renewal*. It focuses on post crisis innovation and adaptation as opposed to image restoration. Post crisis communication that focuses on renewal is conditional and not strategic in order to meet a specific outcome (Seeger et al 2005:83). As the focus of this study is on strategic crisis communication, this viewpoint is not supported. For the purpose of this study, post-evaluative crisis communication should be employed in order to restore relationships with stakeholders and to identify further concerns. To further highlight the importance of two-way symmetrical communication, Ulmer et al (2007:39) emphasise the importance of *listening* to stakeholders during the post-evaluative crisis communication stage: “Effective communication is not a one-way process. We advocate that, after a crisis, organisations provide information to stakeholders but also schedule time to listen to their concerns and to answer their questions”. Benoit and Pang (2008:245) argue that if an organisation is falsely accused of wrongdoing, the organisation must use *communication* to repair the misperception.

The post-evaluative crisis management stage is vital to learn valuable lessons and to avoid a crisis occurrence in the future. This stage is also essential to determine whether the crisis management and communication processes were effective and to highlight areas that require improvement. From this discussion it is also apparent that the crisis management process is *cyclical*, as lessons learned from the aftermath of one crisis can be applied in the proactive crisis management stage of the next; “the end of

one crisis usually leads to the beginning of another. The process is restarted, and the issues-management and planning-prevention systems are reactivated to prevent the possible onset of another” (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt 1996:100).

The following section focuses on analysing existing crisis communication and management processes to determine whether these processes have proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages. The type of communication employed by each process will be a core focus of the discussion. This analysis contributes towards addressing the research problem of determining *key thrusts of existing crisis communication and management processes, and whether the stages of these processes are proactive, reactive and post-evaluative*. The findings from this analysis will also supplement the analysis of crisis processes’ level of strategy in practice.

3.4 ANALYSIS OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

This section firstly provides a motivation for the evaluation of the most prevalent crisis processes evident in the literature. During this analysis it becomes clear that most of the processes are only based on *one* of these *stages* – thereby either being predominantly proactive, reactive or post-evaluative, with only a few processes having all three stages. Thus, following the motivation, the crisis processes evaluated will be categorised as predominantly proactive, reactive or post-evaluative processes (which is based on all three stages respectively) or a process that applies all three stages.

3.4.1 Motivation for crisis process evaluation

The aim of this process evaluation was to highlight the main thrusts of the dominant crisis processes evident in the literature to determine whether it has proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis management stages. The existence of all three these stages was thus a key determinant of a strategic process. Supplementing the latter, the type of communication employed (one-way or two-way) was also evaluated to determine whether it contributed towards relationship building with the *media*, and whether crisis communication is practiced proactively, reactively and post-evaluatively.

The following processes were evaluated for the purpose of this study: Meyers and Holusha’s (1986:207-216) process; Fink’s (1986:67-91) stage process; Pearson and Clair’s (1998:66-73) theoretical process of crisis management; Hale, Dulek and Hale’s (2005:119-121) linear crisis response process; Mitroff’s (1998:18-20) stage process; Horsley and Barker’s (2002:415-418) synthesis process

of crisis management; Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt's (1996:89-101) integrated symmetrical process for crisis communication; Preble's (1997:782-786) integrated crisis strategic management process; MacLiam's (2006:199-230) conceptual process for organisational strategies of crisis communication with the media and Marra's (1992:36-67) process for crisis public relations.

The reason for specifically selecting these processes for evaluation is threefold: Firstly, in order to ensure an accurate evaluation of existing crisis communication and management processes, processes over a wide time span are included (1986-2006). Secondly, it is necessary to include the most prevalent processes that are developed by widely recognised crisis scholars (Fink, Pearson & Clair, Mitroff, Horsley and Barker, Meyers & Holusha). Thirdly, as the research addresses the need for strategic crisis communication, the inclusion of processes that acknowledge the importance of strategic, integrated crisis processes was essential (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt's integrated symmetrical model for crisis communication; Preble's integrated crisis strategic management process and Marra's process for crisis public relations).

Consequently, it can be argued that a comprehensive crisis process selection has been chosen for the study. A detailed analysis of each process is attached as Addendum B. Only a brief summary of the main findings (specifically related to crisis communication) derived from the analysis is highlighted in the discussion below.

3.4.2 Categorisation of crisis processes

A brief summary on the processes according to the proposed stages of a crisis management process is highlighted below:

3.4.2.1 Crisis processes based on the proactive crisis management stage

The processes that are regarded as predominantly proactive are Fink's stage process and Pearson and Clair's process of crisis management. *Fink's stage process* (Fink 1986:67-91; Palumbo 1990:12-22) possesses qualities of a combined process with a core focus on *preparedness*. As the process holds proactive, reactive and post-evaluative qualities, it could be argued that it has the potential to be strategic if these qualities are more specifically developed into stages. Crisis communication should also be regarded as a core element that encapsulates these stages. The process, however, fails to address the importance of building sustainable *relationships* with the media during the crisis preparation. Vital

elements of communication are therefore identified in the process, but it does not recognise the value of *two-way communication* as a relationship building tool.

Pearson and Clair's process of crisis management (Pearson & Clair 1998:66-73; Hale, Dulek & Hale 2005:115) did not display definite actions for implementation. Therefore, it is argued that the process is predominantly *proactive*, as the core focus of the process is to build sustainable relationships with stakeholders and the way in which these relationships can be utilised to obtain positive media coverage during a crisis. The process has the ability to empower communication as a strategic function. However, the process is not a combined process and will therefore not be regarded as strategic. In contrast to Fink's process, this process recognises the importance of two-way communication in order to build stakeholder relationships with the media. It is argued that strong media relationships are likely to generate positive media reporting, resulting in successful crisis management.

3.4.2.2 Crisis processes based on the reactive crisis management stage

The processes regarded as predominantly reactive are Meyers and Holusha's process (Meyers & Holusha 1986:207-216); Hale, Dulek and Hale's (Hale et al 2005:119-121) spiral crisis response communication process; and MacLiam's (MacLiam 2006:199-230) conceptual process for organisational strategies of crisis communication with the media.

Meyers and Holusha's process (Meyers & Holusha 1986:207-216) will assist the crisis manager to detect the seriousness of the situation and to implement the most appropriate response. Although the development of such a framework proposes a sense of proactivity, this process is predominantly *reactive*, as these strategies are focused on analysing the nature of the crisis occurrence itself. The process does not recognise the importance of interaction. It focuses on evaluating the severity of the crisis and the options the organisation has available to address the issue timeously. Therefore, this process is regarded as a linear, one-way communication process, which will not suffice to build relationships with the media.

Hale, Dulek and Hale's spiral crisis communication response process (Hale et al 2005:119-121) is a revision of the linear crisis response communication process. The linear process failed to address the difficulties of the communication process. It has been identified that a cycle of chronological communication activities occurs repeatedly throughout the crisis response phase, which makes the

linear process insufficient. This process aims to reflect the steps that should be taken to structure the communication response during a crisis and the necessary adjustments that have to be made to enable the organisation to adapt to the fluid crisis environment. This process is predominantly reactive as all phases are focused on preparing the crisis response. Consequently, it is not regarded as strategic.

MacLiam's conceptual process for organisational strategies of crisis communication with the media (MacLiam 2006:199-230) focuses on the proposition of crisis response strategies. This process portrays crisis communication as a predominant reactive function. Response strategies are proposed for when the organisation is perceived as being either guilty, or innocent. Although the process does recognise the need for proactive crisis management, post-evaluation is absent. This process is regarded as a reactive process. Although the aim of the process is to provide various crisis communication response strategies, the process fails to recognise that crisis communication should be built on the proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages of crisis management (reciprocal relationship). Effective communication with the media cannot be instilled without prior sustainable relationships and continuous follow-up after a crisis. However, the process does empower the communication function as strategic, as it is proposed that the crisis communication team must have access to top management. However, due to the predominant reactive nature of this process, it is not regarded as strategic.

It is argued that none of the models displayed a predominant post-evaluative focus as proposed in this study. Therefore, the next section will address the processes that displayed all three crisis management stages.

3.4.2.3 Crisis processes in which all three stages are applied

The following processes applied all three of the proposed crisis management stages: Mitroff's (1998:18-20) stage process, Horsley and Barker's (2002:415-418) syntheses process of crisis management, Gozalez-Herrero and Pratt's (1996:89-101) integrated four step symmetrical process for crisis management, Preble's (1997:782-786) integrated crisis strategic management process and Marra's (1992:36-67) process for crisis public relations.

Mitroff's stage process (Mitroff 1988:18-20; Elsubbaugh et al 2004:113; Fearn-Banks 2007:10) could have been more specifically divided into proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages, but do however resemble these stages. Disappointingly, this process does not recognise the importance of

communication – it will thus be regarded as a one-way communication process with the absence of media relationships. This process has the potential to represent a strategic crisis management process, but without recognising communication as a function that encapsulates the whole crisis management process, it lacks an important aspect of strategy.

A key principle that underlines *Horsley and Barker's syntheses process of crisis management* (Horsley & Barker 2002:415-418; Hale et al 2005:115), is that an organisation's level of crisis preparedness and sustainable media relationships play an integral role in rebuilding public trust and confidence in the organisation. Furthermore, the process proposes that crisis communication plans are built on the internal and external organisational environment where crises take place. As the process possesses proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages, it is strategic. Unlike Mitroff's process, this process recognises the importance of crisis communication and the existence of sustainable relationships with the media and other stakeholders prior to the crisis event. However, the importance of communicators' involvement on management level needs to be emphasised to a greater extent.

Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt's integrated four step symmetrical process for crisis management (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt 1996:89-101) is a threefold integration of the situational theory of publics, two-way symmetrical communication and issues management. This process is also cyclical as it is argued that the resolution of one crisis often leads to the beginning of another. The process places high emphasis on crisis communication, but does not directly contribute to empower communication as a strategic function by stating that the crisis communication team should have access to top management. However, through continuously emphasising the importance of communication in all three stages, it does give credit to the value of communication. The reciprocal relationship between crisis communication and crisis management is evident in the process, but it does not state that *two-way* communication should be utilised to develop relationships with the media.

Preble's integrated crisis strategic management process (Preble 1997:782-786) proposes a strategy for integrating crisis management into the strategic management process. It therefore does not aim to make crisis management more strategic, but it does recognise the importance of top management's support for crisis management procedures. It is regarded as a strategic process as it possesses proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages. Although the process is regarded as strategic, it does lack reactive crisis plans (for when disaster strikes). The implementation of this process to crisis situations is

therefore questionable as the crisis plans are not detailed enough. Furthermore, it recognises that open communication should be utilised. However, the process does not stipulate the integrated usage of communication or the utilisation of two-way communication to build sustainable relationships. Thus, effective media relationships could be absent, which could be problematic during a crisis.

Marra's process for crisis public relations (Marra 1992:36-67) portrays a key argument of this study – prior stakeholder relationships and continuous two-way communication will assist the organisation in managing a crisis more effectively. However, the reciprocal relationship between crisis communication and crisis management is absent, as the process is only focused on crisis communication. It therefore empowers communication as a strategic function through its proactive, reactive and post-evaluative portrayal thereof. As two-way symmetrical communication aimed at facilitating sustainable stakeholder relationships is utilised, it can be argued that favourable media reporting could be more likely during a crisis.

It is evident that most of the processes resembled all three stages, with some processes being predominantly focused on the proactive or reactive crisis management stage. A concern is that none of the processes focus on the post-evaluative stage. The processes that are regarded as strategic (thereby applying all three stages) merely exhibit a strategic framework, but lack strategic depth. Furthermore, the processes fail to portray that crisis communication should be applied on each stage and that it encapsulates and connects these stages. Consequently, the reciprocal relationship between crisis management and crisis communication is absent.

In summary, it is argued that the main thrusts of Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt's (1996:89-101) integrated symmetrical process of crisis communication is the most applicable to this study as it portrays the crisis management process as having proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages in which *crisis communication* is evident in each stage. The reciprocal relationship between crisis management and crisis communication is therefore evident. The process strongly supports the utilisation of two-way communication, but unfortunately, does not recognise the importance of building relationships. Although it provides a basic framework for this study's argument, it needs refinement through the incorporation of IC and excellence theory principles.

As the processes predominantly does not recognise the importance of stakeholder relationship building through two-way symmetrical communication and fails to utilise communication to build *relationships* prior to crisis situations, a need for an *integrative crisis communication* framework is therefore evident.

3.5 CRISIS THEORIES

This section focuses on highlighting the most prevalent theories that are applied in crisis situations, which includes the stakeholder theory; the situational theory of publics; the chaos theory; the image restoration theory; and the situational crisis communication theory. These theories are discussed chronologically and each is analysed in terms of its applicability to the study. The focus is on Grunig's (1992:1-28) excellence theory, as it not only guides this study's argument, but also provides the foundation to develop an eventual integrated crisis communication framework.

3.5.1 The stakeholder theory

Edward Freeman developed the stakeholder theory as an approach to *strategic management*. Freeman (1984:46) argues that to “be an effective strategist you must deal with those groups that affect you, while to be responsive and effective in the long-run, you must deal with those groups that you can affect”. A key feature of this theory, emphasised by Ulmer and Sellnow (2000:144), is the mutual influence that stakeholders and an organisation have on each other – stakeholders are affected by the organisation's actions and in turn have an impact on the organisation's ability. The theory aims to understand how stakeholder issues develop and estimate the willingness of these stakeholders to address these issues either by damaging or assisting the organisation (Freeman 1984:26).

Organisations that have ‘stakeholder management capability’ are likely to possess the following capabilities: to design and implement communication processes with numerous stakeholders; strong negotiation tactics to resolve critical issues; generalisation of the marketing approach to serve multiple stakeholders; integration of boundary spanning into the strategy formulation processes; proactivity; allocation of resources in line with stakeholder concerns; and the appointment of ‘stakeholder centric’ managers for the organisation (Freeman 1984:78-80).

As stated by Clarkson (1995:106), the stakeholder theory proposes the need to distinguish between primary and secondary stakeholders. A *primary stakeholder* is those parties that sustain the organisation. Without their support, the organisation will not survive, and predominantly include

shareholders, investors, employees, customers and suppliers. A *secondary stakeholder*, such as the media or an interest group, is not engaged in the actual transactions of the organisation and is not necessary for organisational survival. However, secondary stakeholders influence and are influenced by the organisation and could cause damage to the organisation. As already mentioned in the situational theory of publics, the organisation should not only focus on maintaining relationships with active publics, as the other publics might at any time become active. The exact same argument applies here. The organisation should not just build and preserve relationships with primary stakeholders, but also with secondary stakeholders, as they have the capacity to *mobilise public opinion* (Clarkson 1995:107), which is critical during crisis situations. Solid relationships should be developed with the media in order to generate favourable media reporting during times of crises, as public opinion is often formed based on media reporting. Freeman (1984:126) suggests that a stakeholder audit based on stakeholder behaviour and coalition should be conducted, followed by a stakeholder strategy formulation. The latter can either be generic, specific or integrated in nature. Freeman (1984:26) states that integrated processes for dealing with multiple stakeholders are required.

According to Cowden and Sellnow (2002:196) and Brown (2006:7), the nature of crises necessitates the urgency for communication to diverse stakeholders and therefore highlights the workability of this theory in crisis communication. More specifically to the study, crises stimulate intense media interest (Seeger & Ulmer 2001:370), which increases the urgency for sufficient crisis communication with this stakeholder group.

The theory does accept the importance of stakeholder recognition and relationships as well as the mutual influential relationship between stakeholders and an organisation. However, the theory fails to highlight that two-way symmetrical communication is necessary to build and maintain this win-win relationship between the organisation and key stakeholders, which makes the sustainability of stakeholder relationships questionable. Ulmer and Sellnow (2000:144) state that an “organisation’s viability depends upon its ability to maintain a positive relationship with its stakeholders”. Long-term relationship building enables crisis communicators to become familiar with their stakeholders’ information needs, which is inevitable in crisis situations (Ulmer et al 2007:37). A theory that not only recognises the importance of stakeholder relationships but also proposes measures to develop and uphold these relationships is thus required. Consequently, the stakeholder theory provides a solid foundation for an organisation to identify and categorise stakeholders as well as to become stakeholder

centric through relationship building, but fails to provide measures to create and sustain these stakeholder relationships.

3.5.2 Situational theory of publics

The situational theory, developed by Jim Grunig, argues that “organisations create publics when their actions have consequences for other organisations or groupings of people” (Dozier et al 1995:31). The theory proposes different public categories (Dozier et al 1995:3). When individuals are not affected by the organisation’s behaviour, they are regarded as a *non-public*. When these individuals are unknowingly affected by the organisation’s behaviour, they are regarded as a *latent public*. Once these affected individuals realise they have a universal problem they are regarded as an *aware public*. The individuals only become an *active public* once they decided to address this universal problem. Although most of the organisation’s resources should be dedicated to active publics, the other public categories should not be ignored as they could at any time become active (Grunig & Repper 1992:138).

According to Grunig and Repper (1992:137), the situational theory has been used to explain the communication behaviour of individuals and to categorise individuals into the publics explained in the previous paragraph. The theory proposes the use of three variables to predict the communication behaviour of publics (Grunig & Repper 1992:135-136):

Problem recognition is the realisation or perception that something is lacking. People seek information when they identify a problem. The concept of problem recognition is linked to a situation, as problems arise in life situations. It is further argued that because people are in constant interaction about problematic situations their interpretation of these life situations become evident when they communicate;

Constraint recognition is a communication variable that discourages communication and argues that people do not talk about problems they have little control over; and

Level of involvement is where the concept ‘involvement’ refers to an individual’s cognitive perception of a situation, thus, a person’s perception that he or she has an association with a situation which in turn generates active communication behaviour.

Grunig and Repper (1992:137) state that these variables should be studied collectively as this will explain more efficiently how people will communicate as opposed to studying each variable individually. This theory’s variables have been applied in crisis literature (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt

1996:83; Fall 2004:242) and simultaneously create a pattern in which crises evolve and stipulate the level of urgency with which the crisis has to be addressed. It is argued that active publics, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, have a high level of problem recognition and involvement and a low level of constraint recognition. Therefore, active publics will be more likely to seek information and respond to a crisis (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt 1996:84).

The applicability of the theory to crisis communication is further highlighted by Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996:84), who state “the situational theory is relevant to crisis communication management in that it is useful in understanding organisational behaviour, in planning its response and in anticipating public response to business wrongdoing”. As argued by Grunig (1992:13), publics tend to turn a problem into an issue. If an organisation does not manage its communication with publics prior to these issues, the organisation will be forced to engage in short-term crisis communication, which might intensify the issue. This is in support of the arguments made on the importance of sustainable stakeholder relationship building prior to a crisis.

Although this theory is useful in identifying active publics that are most likely to respond to a crisis, and communication programmes could be developed to address these publics’ concerns and thereby lower the intensity of the crisis, Grunig et al (2002:324) argue that the theory “segments publics based on their perceptions of a situation and subsequent behaviour, not on the desire of an organisation to have relationships with them”. This directly contradicts the argument of the study of building sustainable stakeholder relationships, as the theory only focuses on predicting active publics’ communication behaviour. If the organisation truly wants to manage the communication of an active public during a crisis, a sustainable relationship with these publics prior to the crisis is required, which could be facilitated through two-way symmetrical communication. It is therefore argued that the theory is useful to understand active publics’ perception and interpretation of a crisis, but without solid *relationships* with all public categories, the management and resolution of the crisis could be an impossible task.

3.5.3 The chaos theory

The chaos theory, which is a derivative of the systems theory, attempts to understand the behaviour of systems that follow an unconventional or irregular pattern (Murphy 1996:96). These systems display certain patterns over time, but as Murphy (1996:96) points out, the system’s future direction is never

predicted by past behaviour. The chaos theory holds unique terminology which is summarised in the table below (Du Plooy-Cilliers 2002:38-44; Murphy 1996:96-101):

Table 3.2: Key features of the chaos theory

Feature	Description
Non-linearity	Cause-effect relationships are difficult to predict as the slightest change can influence the outcome. Organisations therefore struggle to manage sudden changes that occurred without warning. Furthermore, a solution that worked in the past may not necessarily apply to current situations.
Feedback	Organisations should utilise positive feedback, as it will result in the destabilisation of the system and also bring innovative patterns into the current system. The organisation becomes more adaptable and flexible.
Bifurcations and phase changes	Sudden changes in the direction of the system caused by destabilisation are known as bifurcations. At this point, the system rearranges itself around a new underlying order which can be similar to or different from the previous one. It is important to note that the occurrence of these sudden changes can be predicted, but their outcome cannot.
Strange attractors	Even non-linear systems hold a deep structure known as an attractor. An attractor is an organising principle to which a phenomenon tends to lean towards as it evolves. Attractors can be divided into static and strange attractors. Static attractors stipulate an outcome that remains unchanged at a certain level. A strange attractor is where outcomes drift continuously and unpredictably within an enclosed range.
Scale	In order to study parts of a system, the system as a whole needs to be studied.
Fractals and correspondence	One can be misled if individual parts of the organisation are studied. The organisation as a whole has to be studied in order to identify patterns. There are certain connections between fragments and the stronger these connections the easier it will be for the system to sustain itself during a state of instability.
Self organisation and self renewal	The chaotic system has the ability to reorganise itself without external intervention. Chaos follows an orderly inner logic.

It is argued that the chaos theory provides a good framework for crises because the dynamic of a crisis is similar to a chaotic system as a crisis forms a series of events that gains momentum over time and develop into an eventual disordered state (Murphy 1996:105). Crises do not follow a linear path; it is indeed unpredictable and sometimes occurs without warning. The organisation has to be flexible and adaptable in order to survive. Change and uncertainty brought about by a crisis also requires this flexibility within the organisation in order to successfully resolve a crisis. The chaos theory supports the view that the organisation as a whole needs to be studied in order to study individual parts of the system. As stated by MacLiam (2006:99), this theory is unique as it assigns a crisis management responsibility to everyone in the organisation as opposed to the application of a separate crisis team, thus reflecting the incorporation of the organisation as a whole. The chaos theory makes the following main contributions towards crisis management and communication: Firstly, the chaos theory provides structure to continuous conflict between stakeholders and an organisation (Murphy 1996:107; Verwey et al 2002:31). Secondly, the theory provides a good understanding of the non-linear, unpredictable

business environment (Verwey et al 2002:29), which forces the organisation to be flexible in order to survive – the same unpredictability is evident in crises and requires a state of adaptability from the organisation in order to manage and resolve the crisis. Thirdly, the chaos theory suggests the need for a continuous strategy development process through the incorporation of preparation and unpredictability (Verwey et al 2002:31). This is of particular importance to the study as it is proposed that crisis management is only effective if it is managed strategically. Fourthly, as the chaos theory is derived from the systems theory that supports symmetrical communication, it can be argued that the stakeholders' concerns and issues during a crisis will be more effectively addressed – open two-way communication will also result in more favourable media reporting. Lastly, the chaos theory holds that learning is initiated through instability (Verwey et al 2002:30). This is evident from the post-evaluative crisis management stage in which learning from crisis experiences can assist in preventing future crises.

In spite of these contributions, the main limitation of the chaos theory is that not enough emphasis is placed on evaluating crisis occurrences and incorporating these lessons in order to assist the organisation to avoid a similar crisis in the future. Furthermore, Murphy (1996:110) states that although the chaos theory resembles the cycle of a crisis and recognises the value of strategy and the utilisation of symmetrical communication, the theory is more useful as “an analogy than a source of practical solutions for relationships between organisations and their stakeholders”.

The chaos theory also resembles the proactive and reactive stages of the crisis management process, through the incorporation of planning (preparation) and reactive (areas of unpredictability) measures. However, this study's argument is that crisis management should be regarded as a process applying three stages, namely proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis management stages, which limits the application of this theory in totality.

3.5.4 The image restoration theory

The image restoration theory, developed by William Benoit (1997), is focused on understanding the nature of attacks and complaints that activate an organisational crisis (Benoit 1997:178; Benoit & Pang 2007:246). Image refers to a subjective impression held by the stakeholders about the organisation, which are created based on the actions of the organisation and perceptions about the organisation

(Benoit & Pang 2007:244). It can be argued that a positive corporate image could assist the organisation in managing a crisis more efficiently as opposed to an organisation with a tarnished image.

Benoit (1997:178) and Benoit and Pang (2007:246) argue that an attack on an organisation or individual's image has two elements namely, that the accused is held responsible for the action or the act is regarded offensive. Benoit and Pang (2007:246) maintain that "if nothing bad had happened, there is no threat to an image" and argue there is only a possible threat to the organisation once an offence has occurred. Furthermore, they state that even though an offence has occurred, it is unlikely that a negative impression of the organisation will be formulated, except when the organisation is responsible for causing the offence. It is also important to note that "perceptions are more important than reality", as the focus is on whether stakeholders *believe* the organisation is guilty, not whether the organisation is in fact guilty (Benoit 1997:178).

Image restoration theory focuses on the content of crisis communication messages (Benoit & Pang 2007:247). The theory proposes five image restoration categories aimed at addressing damaged images (Cowden & Sellnow 2002:199; Benoit 1997:178; Benoit & Pang 2007:248). These strategies are applicable to crisis literature, as crises tend to provoke negative perceptions among stakeholders about the organisation. The five image restoration categories are discussed below.

- a) *Denial* comprises two approaches, namely *simple denial* and *shifting the blame*. One can simply deny the occurrence or alternatively acknowledge the occurrence but claim that another party is responsible for the cause of the act;
- b) *Evasion of responsibility* has four image repair options, namely *provocation*, *defeasibility*, claiming that the occurrence was *accidental* and stressing one's *good intentions*. *Provocation* entails that the organisation's offence was a reaction to a previous offensive act, therefore passing part of the blame on the party that provoked the offensive act. Employing a *defeasibility* strategy implies that a lack of information or control over certain elements caused the offensive act. The organisation can also argue that the offence was *accidental*, as greater blame will be placed on an intentional act. Lastly, it is argued that "doing something wrong while trying something good" may lessen the blame (Benoit & Pang 2007:249).
- c) *Reduce offensiveness*: This category proposes six image restoration strategies, including, *bolstering*, *minimising offensiveness*, *differentiation*, *employing transcendence*, *attacking the*

accuser and *compensation*. *Bolstering* aims to highlight the positive aspects about the accused in order to compensate for the negative perceptions created by the offence. *Minimising offensiveness* implies that it should be highlighted that the offence was an isolated occurrence and not a continuous pattern of misconduct. *Differentiation* could be applied in order to reduce the perceived offensiveness of the organisation's action through comparing the act with similar, but more severe actions. *Employing transcendence* implies placing the act in a more favourable context in order to lessen the perceived level of offence. The organisation could also reduce offensiveness by *attacking the accuser*. This strategy according to Benoit & Pang (2007:250), could assist the organisation to repair its image by either implying that the victim of the attack deserved it or criticising the accuser, thereby lowering the credibility of the attack. The last strategy to reduce offensiveness is by *compensation*, as it is argued that the organisation's image could be improved once the victim accepts the compensation offered.

- d) Benoit and Pang (2007:251) argue that *corrective action* is the most effective image repair strategy. This strategy implies that the organisation commits itself to rectifying the problem.
- e) *Mortification* entails that the organisation admits to committing an offensive act and asks for forgiveness.

The image restoration theory places high emphasis on the importance of the reactive crisis management stage in order to repair a damaged image (the theory is thus also post-evaluative in nature), but fails to recognise that image repair already starts in the pro-active crisis management stage. The limitation of this theory is therefore that it opposes this study's argument of applying an integrated crisis management approach to facilitate strategic crisis management. Furthermore, the utilisation of two-way communication to build sustainable relationships is not evident as a method to restore the organisation's image upon the occurrence of an offensive act.

3.5.5 Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT)

Timothy Coomb's (2004) situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) is predominantly reactive, arguing that information on historical crises create perceptions of present crises. These perceptions should guide the communication responses in an attempt to protect the reputation of the organisation (Coombs 2004:266). Furthermore, the theory utilises communication in order to protect an organisation's image (Coombs 2004:266). The theory also proposes that stakeholders should receive instructions relating to crisis situations in order to protect them from a crisis, and further focuses on

what preventative measures can be implemented to avoid crisis repetition (Coombs 2007:263; Coombs 2004:266). This aspect is relevant to this study as keeping stakeholders abreast of crisis developments and obtaining feedback forms an integral part in the process of building sustainable relationships. However, SCCT only proposes the *instruction* of information, thus resembling a one-way communication approach, which contrasts the study's two-way communication perspective. The SCCT theory is predominantly focused on post crisis communication through response, as it is concerned with the manner in which crisis response can be utilised to protect the organisation's reputation (Coombs 2007:263).

The SCCT holds that a crisis situation will generate "particular attributions of crisis responsibility, the degree to which the organisation is perceived to be responsible for the crisis event" (Coombs 2007:265). This indicates how much the particular crisis could affect the organisation's reputation. SCCT is built on 13 crisis types which are divided into three categories, with the perspective that each crisis indicates a different category of crisis responsibility (Coombs 2007:265). Each category includes crises that hold similar levels of crisis responsibility, ranging from high to low. The theory is further concerned with *crisis history* (crises that the organisation experienced in the past) and *relationship history* (the relationship that the organisation has with stakeholders) and proposes that these two concepts collectively form the *performance history* which indicates the historic behaviour of the organisation (Coombs 2007:266). The theory further argues that a negative performance history intensifies the reputational damage of the crisis type.

Furthermore, SCCT proposes 10 crisis response strategies, grouped into three postures. Coombs (2007:166) defines posture "as a set of strategies that share similar communicative goals and vary in terms of their focus on protecting the crisis victims and taking responsibility for the crisis.... [I]t serves as the link between the crisis types and crisis response strategies". The postures include deny posture (low level of victim concern and responsibility acknowledgement), diminish posture (strategies aimed to modify stakeholder attributions by reframing how the crisis should be interpreted) and deal posture (high level of victim concern and responsibility acknowledgement) (Coombs 2007:267). The various crisis response strategies organised in the above mentioned postures are highlighted below (Coombs 2007:267).

Table 3.3: Crisis response strategies organised in three posture categories

Crisis response strategy	Explanation
Deny posture	
Attack the accuser	The crisis manager confronts individual or group accusing the organisation of wrongdoing
Denial	The crisis manager supports the non-existence of the crisis
Scapegoat	The crisis manager places blame on an external party for the cause of the crisis
Diminish posture	
Excuse	The crisis manager minimises organisational responsibility for the crisis by either claiming that the organisation had no control over the occurrence or holding that the organisation did not intend to do harm
Justification	The crisis manager reduces the alleged damage generated by the crisis
Deal posture	
Integration	The crisis manager emphasises the good work of the organisation in the past
Concern	Concern for the victims is expressed
Compensation	Tangible or monetary gifts are offered to the victim
Regret	The crisis manager expresses the organisation's regret for the crisis occurrence
Apology	The organisation accepts full responsibility for the crisis and expresses a remorseful attitude

The applicability of theories is often questionable, as was the case with the chaos theory. However, SCCT offers various propositions which serves as a framework for the concepts that the theory utilises (Coombs 2007:267). The implementation of this theory is therefore more understandable and evident.

Although the theory does give the necessary credit to the value of communication in crisis situations, the theory is predominantly concerned with reactive crisis communication in order to protect the reputation of the organisation, thereby also addressing post crisis communication. This stands in contrast to the argument posed in the research of viewing communication as an encapsulating process; thus communication should be proactively and reactively employed as well as form part of post crisis evaluation. The SCCT does not place enough emphasis on building stakeholder relationships through mutual beneficial interaction, as it is proposed that information should be instructed to stakeholders, thereby keeping them informed of crisis developments but not providing the opportunity for stakeholder feedback. The theory is more concerned with how stakeholders perceive the organisation as opposed to addressing stakeholder concerns before, during and after a crisis.

Grunig's (1992:3-28) excellence theory, which is the core focus of this study, is discussed in detail below and a justification will be provided as to why this theory could serve as a solid grounding and model for *strategic* crisis communication with the media based on an integrated crisis communication framework.

3.6 THE EXCELLENCE THEORY

Grunig's (1992:3-28) excellence theory is selected for the purpose of the study because it not only facilitates strategic communication, but also underlines the importance of utilising two-way communication in order to build sustainable relationships with stakeholders. Indirectly, the theory also empowers communication as a management function. As the study aims to propose a framework to facilitate *strategic* crisis communication through an IC perspective that is stakeholder centric, this theory is regarded as the most applicable. The excellence theory is an extension of and addresses most of the shortcomings of the other crisis theories as discussed before.

This section defines the excellence theory; discusses the integrated spheres of communication excellence and highlights the worldview that underlines the excellence theory. These sections will predominantly focus on the viewpoints of the fathers of the excellence theory in order to provide an unbiased discussion. The latter is followed by a discussion on the critique against the excellence theory identified in the literature and lastly elaborates on the application of the excellence theory to integrate communication and crisis literature.

3.6.1 Defining the excellence theory

The excellence theory developed by James Grunig in 1984 and later expanded by Grunig and Grunig in 1992, evolved from the search to determine how public relations should be practiced and the communication function be organised in order to contribute to *organisational success* (Grunig 1992:3; Grunig et al 2002:10). It also highlights the *monetary value* of public relations to the organisation (Grunig et al 2002:10). According to Grunig, Grunig and Ehling (1992:86), public relations holds monetary value when it aligns the organisation's goals with the prospects of strategic constituencies. Furthermore, through building sustainable relationships with strategic constituencies, public relations contribute towards *effectiveness*. Grunig et al (1992:86) further highlight that in order for public relations to contribute towards optimal organisational effectiveness, the public relations manager should be a member of the *dominant coalition* of the organisation where he or she has the ability to shape organisational objectives. Dozier et al (1995:15) define 'dominant coalition' as "the group of individuals within an organisation with the power to affect the structure of the organisation, define its mission, and set course through strategic choices the coalition make".

In order to determine how public relations should be practiced and the communication function be organised to contribute to organisational success, Grunig (1992:3) states that investigation on *programme, departmental and organisational* levels is essential:

The *programme level* focuses on the strategic management of individual programmes and indicates how effectively public relations programmes should be managed. It is argued that organisational communication should be practiced *strategically* in order for public relations to contribute towards organisational effectiveness and also when public relations forms part of the strategic planning of the organisation, it is likely that communication programmes will be managed more strategically (Grunig 1992:12-13). The proposed argument is therefore that excellent public relations programmes should be managed strategically at programme level (Grunig 1992:15).

The *departmental level* stipulates the characteristics of departments that practice excellent communication. According to Grunig (1992:15), excellent organisations possess characteristics that managers can relate to and implement in their organisation to increase their level of effectiveness. The “organisational level focuses on the reasons why excellent public relations departments make organisations more effective and identifying the characteristics of organisations and their environments that lead to excellent programmes of communication” (Grunig 1992:15). This level is thus concerned with how the excellence theory can assist the organisation as a whole to function more effectively.

The predominant characteristics of the excellence theory applicable to this study, on programme, departmental and organisational levels are outlined in the following table (Grunig 1992:1-28; Grunig & Grunig 1999:148; Grunig et al 2002:8-18):

Table 3.4: Key characteristics of the excellence theory

Characteristic	Description
Programme level	
1. Managed strategically	Communication programmes should be managed strategically; thus it should be based on <i>research and environmental scanning</i> . Diverse techniques are applied instead of habitual techniques.
Departmental level	
2. A single or integrated department	It is argued that in order to facilitate the strategic management of public relations, and to ensure that PR contributes to the overall strategic organisational objectives, organisations must implement an <i>IC</i> department for all PR activities, or develop a method to coordinate programmes of various departments. This implies that all communication functions should be coordinated by the PR department.
3. Separate function from marketing	Although the excellence theory proposes an integrated public relations function, it is argued that the function should not be integrated with other departments whose core focus is not on communication. PR should thus not be a subsidiary to other departments such as marketing.
4. Direct reporting to senior management	The public relations manager should directly report to senior managers who are part of the dominant coalition.
5. Two-way symmetrical communication model	This model attempts to balance the interest of the organisation with the interests of stakeholders. Symmetrical communicators are loyal to the organisation and to the public they serve. Two-way symmetrical communication will result in better relationship building.
6. Senior PR person in the managerial role	There are four PR roles, namely manager, senior advisor, technician and media liaison, with the manager and technician roles being the most prevalent. In order for communication to be raised as a management function, PR has to fulfil the manager role.
Organisational level	
7. Two-way symmetrical worldview and two-way symmetrical communication	Public relations should serve the interests of both the organisation and the key publics.
8. PR manager has power in dominant coalition	Communicators must build partnerships with the dominant coalition in order for them to value the communicator's input prior to decision making.
9. Participative organisational culture	A participative rather than an authoritarian organisation culture should be employed. A participative culture pulls employees together to collectively accomplish the mission of the organisation. These organisations also favour innovation and are adaptive to new ideas.
10. Symmetrical internal communication structure	The excellence theory holds that organisations should practice symmetrical internal communication which also supports the participative culture of the organisation through knowledge sharing and cooperation among employees.
11. Organic organisational structure	The traditional mechanistic view of the organisation is replaced with a less bureaucratic, organic structure. Employees have easy access to top management and welcome input from staff.
12. The organisation operates in a complex, volatile environment	Modern organisations operate in a volatile environment and have to be flexible in order to survive.

To further contribute towards defining the excellence theory, Dozier et al (1995:10) stipulate that communication excellence consists of three spheres that stand in a concentric relationship (each sphere develops out of the other). These spheres are discussed in the next section.

3.6.2 The integrated spheres of communication excellence

Dozier et al (1995:10) maintain that the three spheres of communication excellence represent the essence of the excellence factor. It includes the knowledge core (centre sphere); surrounded by shared expectations about communication between communicators and management (middle sphere) and is embedded in an encapsulating sphere of shared expectations (outer sphere).

3.6.2.1 The core sphere of communicator knowledge

Although excellent and less excellent communication programmes both involve creative, technical communication skills, Dozier et al (1995:11) state that to simply enhance technical communication roles does not characterise excellent communication. Instead, the core sphere of communicator knowledge of an excellent communication department, “involves management role playing, specifically strategic management”. The most important factor that contributes toward the excellence factor is the application of the communication department’s expertise to fulfil the *communication manager role* (Dozier et al 1995:11).

Dozier et al (1995:12) state that the knowledge that characterises excellent communication is the utilisation of *two-way communication*. As discussed above, two-way communication can either be symmetrical or asymmetrical, but as argued before, two-way symmetrical communication dominates in the excellence factor, although excellent communicators use both asymmetrical and symmetrical communication. Dozier et al (1995:14) note that in order to practice two-way communication, practitioners require knowledge about research methods and interpretation processes. Two-way communication is essential in crisis management not just to build sustainable relationships with stakeholders and to maintain credibility in crisis situations, but to generate an internal ‘one-mouth’ response, therefore not delivering diverse crisis response messages to the media and public.

3.6.2.2 The middle sphere of shared expectations

According to Dozier et al (1995:15), a communicator’s expertise cannot build communication excellence in isolation. *Partnerships* must be formulated with the organisation’s dominant coalition, as

the dominant coalition has the authority to set direction (Dozier et al 1995:15). As argued previously, sustainable partnerships have to be cultivated between the organisation and stakeholders prior to a crisis. Both Dozier et al (1995:15) and Ulmer et al (2007:35) argue that this partnership is created through *dialogue* in order to facilitate shared understandings or expectations about the role of communication in the organisation.

In organisations with excellent communication departments, communicators' input is valued prior to decision making (Dozier et al 1995:14). In this role, the communicator acts as a boundary and environmental scanner and early warning system as discussed in Chapter 2. This role is vital in crisis management, as issues can be detected and resolved before they develop into crises. The communicators educate the dominant coalition about the likes and dislikes of stakeholders and how they might react to the proposed strategic decisions (Dozier et al 1995:14). As is evident from this discussion, stakeholder relationship building is an essential function of communication, necessary on *strategic level*, as argued in Chapter 2. Excellent communicators create messages in order to achieve the dominant coalition's desired outcomes. It is vital to note that in order to facilitate two-way communication, the top communicator makes decisions *in cooperation* with other senior managers (Dozier et al 1995:15).

A critical connection is formulated between the communication department and the dominant coalition, once the dominant coalition understands the dynamics of communication excellence and communicators have the knowledge to provide such excellence (Dozier et al 1995:16). This is summarised as follows:

[W]hen dominant coalitions expect communicators to think strategically to solve a problem or conflict with a key public, that reinforces the knowledge or expertise in the communication department to deliver communication excellence. When communicators respond strategically to help solve a problem important to the dominant coalition, that reinforces the strategic view of communication in the dominant coalition (Dozier et al 1995:16-17).

Therefore, it is evident that it is a two-way process (the facilitation of shared expectations) to instil communication excellence and to create the realisation that communication should be practiced strategically.

3.6.2.3 *The outer sphere of participative culture*

Organisations that have participative cultures enable employees to work as a team to achieve a common goal (Grunig et al 2002:483). The departmental goals are in line with the overall objectives of

the organisation. An organisation that values teamwork, involves employees in the decision making process and is receptive towards outside ideas (Dozier et al 1995:17).

It is argued that the opposite of a participative culture is an authoritarian culture, where the organisation is not receptive towards ideas from the outside. This type of culture would contribute little value to excellent communication. However, the organisation's culture is of secondary importance to communication excellence, as the nurturing quality of a participatory culture alone cannot instil communication excellence nor create strategic, two-way communication programmes (Dozier et al 1995:18). It is therefore argued that a participative culture will be more suitable as opposed to an authoritarian culture in order to facilitate excellent communication.

Grunig and White (1992:31) argue that the key to understanding the excellence study starts at the perceptions that people hold about public relations, therefore the worldview of public relations. It is argued that the conventional understanding of public relations needs to be altered in order to have a clear understanding of the excellence concept.

3.6.3 The worldview that underlines the excellence study

Grunig and White (1992:31) maintain that in order to instil excellent public relations, this discipline must be viewed as “symmetrical, idealistic, critical and managerial”. However, the dominant worldview is that public relations is *asymmetrical*, which indicates that public relations focus on achieving what the organisation aspires to accomplish, without any compromises (Grunig & White 1992:39). The asymmetrical worldview drives public relations practitioners to unethical and unproductive actions (Grunig & White 1992:40). When practicing asymmetrical public relations, a presupposition that ‘the organisation knows best’ exists, manipulating stakeholders into thinking that they will benefit when they accept this stance.

In contrast, it is argued that excellent public relations follows the more practical worldview of a *symmetrical* process, which is a process of *compromise* and *negotiation*. Grunig and White (1992:39) maintain that the symmetrical worldview is more effective, as “organisations get more of what they want when they give up some of what they want”.

The discussion on asymmetrical and symmetrical worldviews is rooted in Grunig's (Grunig & White 1992:31;39) elaboration on the four models of public relations, namely press agency, public information and two-way asymmetrical models, which are all asymmetrical, and the two-way symmetrical model, which represents the symmetrical worldview (Grunig & White 1992:39). The asymmetrical models aim to change the behaviour of publics, without adjusting the organisation's behaviour. A short description of each model is summarised in the table below (Grunig & White 1992:39; Dozier et al 1995:13):

Table 3.5: The four models of public relations

Model of public relations	Description
Press agency model	The aim of this model of public relations is to maximise media publicity
Public information model	Public relations utilises in-house journalists to report objective, but positive information about the organisation
Two-way asymmetrical model	The organisation use messages that are most likely to persuade publics to behave in favour of the organisation
Two-way symmetrical model	This model uses research and two-way communication to instil an understanding among stakeholders and to manage conflict

Dozier et al (1995:13) state that the press agency and public information models symbolise *one-way communication*, as the information flows outward from the organisation to stakeholders. The two-way asymmetrical model focuses on obtaining information in order to support management's decision making processes in which communicators develop messages that are most likely to persuade publics to behave according to the organisation's desires (Dozier et al 1995:13). However, the information collected about stakeholders is not used to adjust the organisation's behaviour.

The two-way symmetrical model also requires the knowledge and understanding of stakeholders to give management direction and to implement communication programmes. However, this two-way communication aims to instil *mutual understanding* between the organisation and stakeholders (Dozier et al 1995:13). Win-win solutions are developed in order to resolve conflict.

Furthermore, Grunig and White (1992:42) argue that the presuppositions that guide public relations activities must be in line with the larger organisational structure and culture. The following compares the characteristics of organisations practicing an asymmetrical worldview, against organisations practicing a symmetrical worldview (Grunig & White 1992:43-44):

Table 3.6: The characteristics of an asymmetrical and symmetrical organisation

Characteristics of organisations that practice an asymmetrical worldview	Characteristics of organisations that practice a symmetrical worldview
<i>Internal orientation:</i> Organisational members view the organisation from the inside out – the way in which outsiders view the organisation is not taken into consideration	<i>Interdependence:</i> Although organisations have boundaries that separate them from their external environment, organisations cannot separate them from their surrounding environment
<i>Closed system:</i> Information flows from the organisation to stakeholders	<i>Open system:</i> Organisations exchange information with the outside
<i>Efficiency and cost control</i> are a higher priority than innovation	<i>Moving equilibrium:</i> The organisation instils an equilibrium that continuously moves as the environment changes
<i>Elitism:</i> Organisational leaders know best – they have more knowledge than the members of the public	<i>Equity:</i> Anyone in the organisation is allowed to provide input in the organisation, it is not a privilege only ascribed to managers
<i>Conservatism:</i> The organisation is not open to change	<i>Autonomy:</i> People are more constructive when they have the autonomy to influence their own behaviour as opposed to being controlled
<i>Tradition:</i> The tradition of the organisation keeps it stable and helps to preserve its culture	<i>Innovation:</i> The organisation thrives on new ideas and clever thinking as opposed to preserving tradition
<i>Central authority:</i> Only a selected few managers have the authority to make decisions. The employees have little or no independency and the organisation is managed as autocracies	<i>Decentralisation of management:</i> Instead of dictating, managers should be collective and coordinating.
	<i>Responsibility:</i> People should be concerned with the consequences that their actions have on others
	<i>Conflict</i> should be <i>resolved</i> through negotiation, communication and compromise

From the above characteristics it is evident that in order for organisations to successfully manage crises, it has to instil a *symmetrical* worldview. The organisation has to be open and able to adapt to environmental changes, as high levels of change are brought about by crises. Furthermore, the organisation has to encourage an interdependent relationship with its stakeholders in order to build sustainable relationships that are necessary to communicate effectively with stakeholders during an organisational disaster.

The previous sections focused on defining the excellence theory based on the viewpoints of communication excellence theorists. However, it is also necessary to highlight critique against the theory that is evident in the literature.

3.6.4 Critique against the excellence theory

The main criticism against the excellence theory is based on the theory's predominant two-way communication focus. It is argued that processes that promotes two-way communication and cooperation signifies goodness and morality. However, taking a moral stand in some instances requires

the avoidance of two-way communication, as it could affect the ethicality of communication (Cancel, Mitrook & Cameron 1999:173). This argument is applicable in situations when, for example, the organisation cannot reveal confidential information during a crisis (Squier 2009). Similarly, Cameron, Cropp and Reber (2000:243) argue that despite communication practitioners' drive towards two-way communication, it would not always be possible. Field and Molesworth (2006:392) state that this can be attributed towards the complexity that two-way communication holds. In agreement, Welch and Jackson (2007:187) argue that the two-way communication focus of the excellence theory is unrealistic, especially for internal communication, and that it can only be a reality for smaller organisations.

Although the researcher acknowledges the above critique, this study proposes that two-way communication is necessary to build relationships with the media, which will assist the organisation to communicate more effectively with the media during crises. Furthermore, two-way communication should be applied in order to build sustainable stakeholder relationships in general, which will assist the organisation to not only retain its credibility during crises, but also sufficiently manage and resolve the crisis through mutual beneficial solutions. Keeping all stakeholders abreast of developments during crises and maintaining an open door relationship will strengthen the organisation's reputation and stimulate positive media reporting.

Furthermore, the excellence theory has two other main contributions for the purpose of this study. Firstly, it recognises that communication should be practiced on *strategic level*, thereby empowering the communication discipline. When communication is practiced strategically, the value of crisis communication as a continuous strategic function will also become more evident. Secondly, the theory recognises that organisations function in a *volatile environment* which necessitates a flexible organisational structure to constantly adapt to changes. Organisational crises bring about high levels of change, which therefore demand a flexible organisational structure in order to survive.

In the section to follow, the relation between the main paradigms of this study namely excellence theory, IC and crisis literature will be drawn.

3.6.5 Applying the excellence theory to IC and crisis literature

Fearn-Banks (1996:11; 2002:15; 2007:54) and Marra (1992:38) recognise the applicability of the excellence theory to crisis communication and management. According to Fearn-Banks (2007:55), organisations are forced to practice two-way symmetrical communication in crisis situations, although most often organisations engage in asymmetrical, one-way communication practices. Marra (1992:38) argues that sustainable stakeholder relationship building prior to a crisis, a key quality of the excellence theory, will assist the organisation to manage a crisis effectively. The absence of interrelationships creates conflict and conflict significantly increases during crisis situations. Marra (1992:39) therefore maintains that “excellent crisis communication is an organisation’s ability to produce or maintain positive or neutral relationships with key publics”.

Marra (1992:40,44,52,59) developed the following hypotheses in an attempt to develop a crisis public relations model, which is in line with the propositions of the excellence theory: Organisations with sustainable relationships with stakeholders will suffer less financial, emotional, or perceptual damage than organisations with weak stakeholder relationships; Organisations that utilise two-way symmetrical crisis communication will suffer less financial, emotional or perceptual damage as opposed to organisations that use silence or asymmetrical communication practices; Organisations that instil continuous risk communication, create proactive crisis management plans and use two-way symmetrical crisis communication will have stronger stakeholder relationships and, again, will suffer less financial, emotional or perceptual damage as opposed to organisations that do not implement risk communication and proactive crisis management programmes; Lastly, organisations that have communication ideologies that encourage and support proactive crisis management and two-way symmetrical crisis communication will suffer less financial, emotional or perceptual damage in comparison to organisations that instil communication ideologies that do not support proactive crisis management or two-way symmetrical communication.

Furthermore, Fearn-Banks (2007:59) state that an organisation that implements an open and honest policy with stakeholders and the news media (which is facilitated through two-way communication) will suffer less financial, emotional and perceptual damage as opposed to an organisation with a closed organisational policy.

The predominant characteristics of the excellence theory, on the programme, departmental and organisational levels as discussed earlier, developed by Grunig (1992:1-28) and further expanded by Grunig et al (2002:8-18), will be outlined in Table 3.7 below, with reference to the applicability of each characteristic to crisis literature. As the study aims to address *strategic* crisis communication through *IC*, it is also necessary to highlight the link between the excellence theory and the former. The purpose of the following table is therefore to display how the excellence theory encapsulates the key concepts of this study, namely crisis communication and the facilitation of a strategic crisis communication process through *IC*. By doing so, the table simultaneously illustrates the inter-relationship between *IC* and *excellence theory*.

Table 3.7: Applying the key characteristics of the excellence theory to IC and crisis literature

Characteristic	Description	Applicability to crisis literature	Overlap and applicability to IC
Programme level			
1. Managed strategically	Communication programmes should be managed strategically; thus it should be based on <i>research and environmental scanning</i> . Diverse techniques are applied instead of habitual techniques.	This characteristic accentuates proactive crisis management as thorough research and environmental scanning has to be conducted to determine the vulnerability and likelihood of the organisation to experience a crisis as well as to ensure the early detection and resolution of issues before it results into crises. Research on past crisis experiences can also assist the organisation to plan for and manage future difficulties.	IC is strategic in nature, contributing to the strategic thinking processes of the organisation. As indicated in Chapter 2, strategic communication (which is facilitated through the application of IC) inter alia, contributes the <i>early detection of issues</i> and the application of <i>research</i> in order to understand the cause of the problem.
Departmental level			
2. A single or integrated department	It is argued that in order to facilitate the strategic management of public relations, and to ensure that PR contributes to the overall strategic organisational objectives, organisations must implement an <i>IC</i> department for all PR activities, or develop a method to coordinate programmes of various departments. This implies that all communication functions should be coordinated by the PR department.	This element emphasises the importance of an integrated crisis communication plan which highlights the integration of internal and external messages and that all communication of the organisation is driven by the strategic objective of the organisation. By using IC, strategic relationships can be developed with the media, which serves as an integral element of pre-crisis planning.	IC supports the viewpoint that there is room for integration between PR and marketing communication, as the tools and markets of these disciplines overlap.
3. Separate function from marketing	Although the excellence theory proposes an integrated public relations function, it is argued that the function should not be integrated with other departments whose core focus is not on communication. PR should thus not be a subsidiary to other departments such as marketing.	The value of crisis communication will be more evident with the utilisation of communication as a fully-fledged management function, thereby not fulfilling a support function for each department. The likelihood of a continuous, integrated crisis management plan could be higher, as the organisation realises the worth of (crisis) communication.	Although this characteristic contrasts the principle of IC that proposes that all communication should be managed by an integrated agency, IC places emphasis on <i>cross functional planning and monitoring</i> . Therefore, the focus is not so much placed on the integration of marketing and public relations functions, but the ability of these functions to complement each other by an integrated relationship. The value of communication and public relations cannot be replaced by marketing and vice versa. The purpose is to create synergy between various communication messages.

4. Direct reporting to senior management	The public relations manager should report directly to senior managers who are part of the dominant coalition.	A direct reporting relationship will ensure faster acceptance and implementation of the crisis management and communication plan as well as management's acceptance of the importance of crisis management as a continuous process.	IC is a strategic management process, thereby implying that communication should permeate through the entire organisation, which means that communication is driven by the <i>strategic intent of the organisation as a whole</i> and not by the communication or marketing department's individual strategy. Therefore, the head of communication should have a direct reporting relationship with the dominant coalition.
5. Two-way symmetrical communication model	This model attempts to balance the interest of the organisation with the interests of stakeholders. Symmetrical communicators are loyal to the organisation and to the public they serve. Two-way symmetrical communication will result in better relationship building.	Two-way symmetrical communication at departmental level will facilitate sustainable relationships internally which will serve as a platform to develop a strategic crisis communication plan to interact with external stakeholders. Two-way symmetrical communication will also facilitate sustainable relationships with the media which is an inevitable step for pre-crisis management in order to manage a crisis effectively.	IC focuses on communicating <i>with</i> stakeholders, not <i>to</i> them. Dialogue will ensure that the stakeholders are active, interactive and equal participants of a continuing communication process.
6. Senior PR person in the managerial role	There are four PR roles, namely manager, senior advisor, technician and media liaison, with the manager and technician roles being most prevalent. In order for communication to be raised as a management function, PR has to fulfil the manager role.	If communication is regarded as a management function, the crisis communicator will receive immediate buy-in from senior management on the importance of crisis management. The strategic crisis management process will allow effective communication with the media.	As the strategic objective in IC drives all communication messages, communication has to fulfil a managerial role.
Organisational level			
7. Two-way symmetrical worldview and two-way symmetrical communication	Public relations should serve the interests of both the organisation and the key publics.	Balancing the interests of the organisation with key publics will enable the organisation to effectively manage and resolve conflict.	IC supports the two-way symmetrical model of communication in order to facilitate understanding and communication as opposed to merely identifying messages in order to influence or inspire stakeholders.
8. PR manager has power in dominant coalition	Communicators must build partnerships with the dominant coalition in order for them to value the communicator's input prior to decision making (Dozier et al 1995: 14).	When communicators have a partnership with the dominant coalition, it is most likely that the crisis strategy suggested by the crisis communicator will be accepted as opposed to management employing ignorant solutions for crises.	On organisational level, IC proposes CEO/Stakeholder integration. This implies that the mission of the organisation should be continuously communicated to the lower levels of the organisation and a simultaneous awareness of communication on top management level. The CEO is therefore regarded as the organisational integration initiator, as argued in Chapter 2.

9. Participative organisational culture	A participative rather than an authoritarian organisation culture should be employed. According to Dozier et al (1995:17), participative cultures pull employees together to collectively accomplish the mission of the organisation. These organisations also favour innovation and are adaptive to new ideas.	A participative organisational culture is inevitable for effective crisis management, as a sound internal organisational climate and understanding of the crisis will result in effective crisis communication to the outside. The nature of a crisis requires an organisational structure that is able to adapt to environmental demands, which is facilitated through a participative culture.	It is evident that a participative culture in IC is necessary, as IC proposes that internal and external messages should be integrated in order to avoid fragmented messages. This could only be achieved through a sound internal organisational climate facilitated by an organisational culture that pulls employees together as one collective entity to achieve the organisational mission.
10. Symmetrical internal communication structure	The excellence theory holds that organisations should practice symmetrical internal communication which also supports the participative culture of the organisation through knowledge sharing and cooperation among employees.	As stated above, a sound internal organisational climate is necessary in order to successfully address a crisis. Two-way communication should be utilised internally in order to keep employees abreast of new developments during a crisis and to sustain the participative culture.	Message fragmentation is avoided through the integration of internal and external messages, which requires a symmetrical internal communication structure.
11. Organic organisational structure	The traditional mechanistic view of the organisation is replaced with a less bureaucratic, organic structure. Employees have easy access to top management, who welcomes input from staff.	Crisis communicators require easy access to top management in order to ensure the effective execution of the crisis management plan.	As IC plans are in line with the strategic objectives of the organisation, an open door relationship between the IC department and top management is essential. The mechanistic organisational structure will therefore not suffice.
12. The organisation operates in a complex, volatile environment	Modern organisations operate in a volatile environment and have to be flexible in order to survive.	This volatile environment brings about change and uncertainty, which is also characteristic of an organisational crisis. Organisations must employ strategic crisis management plans to effectively manage change and uncertainty brought about by organisational crises.	IC proposes the idea of the <i>renaissance communicator</i> , which is based on the notion that, due to constant environmental changes, there is a need for a different approach to communication in order to instil strategic organisational communication. The IC model proposes <i>environmental integration</i> which implies that the organisation is functioning in an open system. Organisations have to know what is happening in their environments in order to survive.

It is vital to mention that, for the purpose of this study, only the most prominent characteristics of the excellence theory are highlighted above. However, Grunig (1992:28) and Grunig et al (2002:9) also stipulate two other characteristics evident on departmental level, namely a) the potential for excellent public relations through knowledge of the symmetrical model and managerial role, academic training in public relations and professionalism; and b) an equal opportunity for both genders in public relations. It is argued that the first characteristic is a duplicate of the other characteristics already mentioned on departmental level which is also too public relations-centric (as a profession). The second characteristic is also not included in the above table, as gender issues in public relations addresses a different argument not applicable to this study.

Grunig (1992:28) and Grunig et al (2002:9) further propose that excellent public relations provide the following valuable outcomes (which also serve as characteristics of excellent communication): *Communication programmes that meet communication objectives*: excellent communication programmes are more likely to achieve the proposed objectives as opposed to ordinary communication programmes. When excellent crisis communication programmes are implemented, the possibility that an issue could evolve into a reputation threatening crisis is lowered as most issues will already be addressed and resolved in the developmental phase; *Reduction of costs associated with regulation, pressure and litigation*: Sustainable relationships' value lies in the fact that money that would have been spent on conflict resolution, manifested in regulation, legislation and litigation, is now saved. Two-way communication could lower internal and external conflict during crises as issues will be resolved through mutual beneficial solutions, and; *High levels of job satisfaction among employees*: a participative culture generates satisfied employees which results into a productive workforce. A sound internal organisational climate is essential to successfully address a crisis from the outside.

From the above discussion, it is evident that the excellence theory underlines this study's argument, that two-way communication with the media will assist the organisation to proactively build sustainable media relationships and could enable the organisation to communicate effectively during a crisis, as well as contribute towards resolving the crisis faster.

3.7 SUMMARY

In this chapter it was argued that strategic management processes possess proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages, and each of these stages, pertaining to crisis management, was discussed. It was

stated that in order for a crisis management process to be strategic all three stages have to be applied. Due to the reciprocal relationship between crisis management and communication, a strategic crisis communication process should therefore also have these stages. Crisis communication should thus not only be practiced reactively.

As an introduction to this Chapter, clarification on terminology uniquely applied to this study was highlighted and a mind map for strategic crisis communication was displayed to present and clarify what aspects, according to the literature, has to be implemented to instil an eventual integrated crisis communication framework.

The proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis management stages were discussed, after which several crisis management and communication processes were evaluated to determine whether they have these stages. The existence of proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis management stages was used as a key determinant in identifying a strategic process. The processes predominantly represented either the proactive or reactive crisis management stage. Although some of the processes did display proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages, with the existence of crisis communication on each stage, it lacked strategic depth. A need for an *integrated crisis communication framework*, in which excellence theory and IC variables are applied on the proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages, to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media, was highlighted.

The most prominent crisis theories were discussed and evaluated with key emphasis on the excellence theory as core driver of this study. The reason for this is that it is argued that the theory facilitates the strategic communication and the use of two-way symmetrical communication to build sustainable stakeholder relationships, which also underlines the principles of IC. The excellence theory also specifies that organisations operate in a volatile environment which necessitates adaptable organisational structures in order to survive – a prerequisite for sufficient crisis management.

The next chapter focuses on explaining this study's research approach and methodology to investigate the extent to which crisis communication processes are strategic in practice.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

“The qualitative case study is explanatory in nature and provides rich longitudinal data about individuals or situations.” (Lindegger 2006:461).

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The main aim in the previous chapter was to evaluate existing crisis communication and crisis management processes in terms of the proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis management stages. This crisis communication and crisis management evaluation was conducted based on the argument that a strategic management process has planning, implementation and evaluation elements, which therefore correlates with these stages. The evaluation indicated that some of the processes display a strategic structure (thus having proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages). It was argued that a lack of *strategic depth* existed, which is needed to facilitate strategic communication with the media. It was also argued that the importance of building sustainable relationships through two-way communication, as well as recognising that crisis communication should encapsulate the crisis management process (reciprocal relationship between crisis communication and crisis management), was not evident in existing theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, it was argued that a crisis process that resembles the proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages of a strategic management process need to be supplemented by IC and excellence theory variables to ensure a comprehensive strategic process.

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the *research methodology* used to determine whether crisis management and crisis communication processes *in practice* display a comprehensive strategic crisis communication process with the media. Based on the main thrusts of the previous chapters, the methodological framework in this chapter enabled the researcher to firstly determine whether crisis communication processes in practice apply proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages; and secondly, whether the excellence theory and IC variables were evident or applied to support the framework for an integrated (therefore strategic) crisis communication process. This chapter therefore contributes towards:

a) Highlighting the *methodological outline* used in practice to obtain the necessary insights required to achieve the twofold objective of this study, namely; to determine whether existing crisis communication and management processes (in theory and practice) contribute towards the strategic

management of a crisis and effective communication with the media, and; to emphasise the need for an integrated crisis communication framework to ensure that crisis communication with the media is efficiently and strategically managed.

b) Specifying that the methodology required to address the research problem is through a qualitative case study approach. As identified previously, the research problem is *to explore whether existing crisis communication models contribute towards the strategic management of a crisis through an IC approach to ensure that crisis communication with the media, employed by a South African financial services provider is strategically and efficiently managed.*

This chapter is structured to address the following key areas: a methodological orientation, specifically focusing on the qualitative case study approach; the research design, through addressing the population, unit of analysis and the realised sample; the data collection method (triangulation through combining an exploratory one-on-one interview and focus group using semi-structured questionnaire categories as well as a pilot test); the reliability and validity of the research, and; the data analysis method.

4.2 METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

Research methodology focuses on *how* the researcher obtains more knowledge about a specific topic of interest (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:99; Terre Blance & Durrheim 2006:6) and it refers to the manner in which social phenomena is analysed (Corbin & Strauss 2008:1). Similarly, research methodology focus on “the knowledge of how or ‘know how’ to do things or the total set of ‘means’ that scientists employ in reaching their goal of valid knowledge” (Mouton 2002:35). In order to do this, the section will firstly define the qualitative research paradigm, and secondly the case study research method.

4.2.1 The qualitative research paradigm

The qualitative research paradigm was utilised for the purpose of this study, as it is important to obtain knowledge and insights from communication practitioners responsible for composing and implementing crisis communication plans, to determine whether it is strategic to contribute towards *effective* crisis communication with the media. This section firstly defines qualitative research and draws a comparison between qualitative and quantitative research to highlight that the qualitative research paradigm was the most viable form for the purpose of this study. Supplementing the latter discussion, the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research is also addressed.

4.2.1.1 Defining qualitative research

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) define qualitative research as a “multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative research study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. Qualitative research measures the research participants’ knowledge about a specific topic, and “takes into account that viewpoints and practices in the field are different because of the different subjective perspectives and social backgrounds related to them” (Flick et al 2000:6).

In characterising qualitative research, Michal-Johnson (1993:176) states that qualitative research has different underlying assumptions than quantitative research; it is closely aligned with language as a tool to construct meaning and it is bound to a specific time and place (Michal-Johnson 1993:176). Chambliss and Schutt (2006:167) argue that qualitative research poses an exploratory research question as starting point, as it usually focuses on unstudied or unexplored processes. It is concerned with the interconnections between social phenomena, is focused on human subjectivity and is responsive towards the subjective role of the researcher. Furthermore, as stipulated in the definition by Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2), supported by Babbie et al (2007:270), qualitative research is conducted in the *natural setting* of the participant, which enables the researcher to familiarise him or herself with the participants involved and therefore obtain a better *understanding* of their behaviour (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias 2000:257). Qualitative research is thus concerned with obtaining detailed, *firsthand* knowledge from participants in their natural surroundings. It focuses on understanding and interpreting the participant’s viewpoint through meaningful conversation.

In contrast, the *quantitative* research paradigm focuses on facts and objectivity (Durrheim & Painter 2006:132) and attaches meaning to situations of which the variables are known beforehand and enables the researcher to control and measure these variables (Terre Blance, Kelly & Durrheim 2006:272). The quantitative research paradigm is concerned with the *quantification of constructs*; thereby attaching numbers to the qualities of things (Babbie et al 2007:49). According to Du Plooy (2002:82), a researcher will utilise quantitative research to *count and/or measure* phenomena. The main differences between quantitative and qualitative research are tabulated below (Du Plooy 2002:82-84; Fouché 2005:269; Babbie et al 2007:273):

Table 4.1: Differences between the qualitative and quantitative research paradigms

Qualitative research	Quantitative research
It involves <i>inductive</i> reasoning, thereby the research will start with <i>observations</i> and end with <i>descriptions</i>	It involves <i>deductive</i> reasoning by forming hypotheses to identify various constructs, variables and relationships
The focus is to <i>contextualise</i>	The focus is to <i>generalise</i>
Areas where limited or no prior knowledge exists are interpreted comprehensively	Quantities, degrees and relationships are predicted, explained and described
Research is conducted in a natural setting	Research is conducted in a controlled setting
Inter-subjectivity is key in order to gain the trust of the participants	Maximum control over extraneous factors
The researcher will develop a research strategy during the research process (thus not determined beforehand)	The research strategy usually involves a predetermined, step-by-step recipe

From the above discussion, the quantitative research paradigm was not appropriate, as the purpose of this study was to obtain the subjective viewpoints of the participants who have firsthand knowledge of their organisation’s crisis management and crisis communication processes. This was most effectively achieved through qualitative methods including:

- The utilisation of a research topic of which limited prior knowledge exists, and which therefore requires in-depth exploration (research on *strategic* crisis communication is limited, as highlighted in the literature);
- Meaningful *conversations* with the participants; and
- An environment within which trust and rapport between the researcher and participants can be built.

4.2.1.2 Advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research

Various authors argue that qualitative research holds the following advantages: It provides insights from the participants’ viewpoint (Flick 2000:5; Denzin & Lincoln 1994:5; Corbin & Strauss 2008:12); it is more likely to measure daily constraints of the social world than quantitative research (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:5); it is interpretative, emergent and evolving (Marshall & Rossman 1999:2); it emphasises the *value laden nature of inquiry* and provides rich descriptions of the social world (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:4); it allows comprehensive measurement of new or emergent concepts (Chambliss & Schutt 2006:259; Corbin & Strauss 2008:13); and studies human actions in its natural surroundings (Babbie et al 2007:278). The advantages of utilising qualitative research for this study was that the researcher obtained insights from crisis communication practitioners based on their experience on whether crisis communication should be practiced strategically.

A disadvantage of utilising qualitative research, applicable to this study, was researcher bias, which is defined by Babbie (2007:250) as “that quality of a measuring instrument device that tends to result in a misrepresentation of what is being measured in a particular direction”. Thus, when the researcher integrated statements confirmed by the literature in the questions posed to the participants, it sometimes resulted in the participant providing an answer favourable towards the particular argument. Further disadvantages associated with qualitative research are that the scope is limited and that the sample in qualitative research is not meant to be representative of the population, but rather that the results are to be generalised to theory (Bryman 2004:284). The validity of qualitative research is also a concern if the researcher made no attempt to deal with opposing subjects (Silverman 2000:11). However, the researcher introduced methods to ensure that the study can be researched further in future.

4.2.2 The case study research method

Qualitative research involves various empirical materials, some of which are the case study, personal experience, introspective, life story and interviews (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:2). For the purpose of this study an explorative case study was utilised. The nature of the case study is firstly addressed, followed by a discussion on the various advantages and disadvantages associated with the case study research method.

4.2.2.1 The nature of the case study research method

As stated above, qualitative research involves various research methods. Babbie et al (2007:279-283) specifically differentiate between three qualitative research methods, namely ethnographic studies, life stories and case studies. Ethnographic studies are concerned with cultural anthropology which evolves from studying a specific society’s behaviour. A case study is an in-depth discussion of a person’s life. However, the focus of this study is not on gathering insights on the organisation’s culture or on a personal life story, but on obtaining in-depth insights from the participants on their organisation’s crisis communication processes. The case study method, which is defined as an “intensive investigation of a single unit” (Babbie et al 2007:281), was selected for the purpose of this study, as it assisted the researcher to obtain rich insights.

A case study approach is a combination of research methodology and the way in which the findings are classified and reported (Colton & Covert 2007:371). According to Fouché (2005:272), it is “an exploration or in-depth analysis of a ‘bounded system’ (bounded by time and/or place), or a single or

multiple case, over a period of time". The case study is thus concerned with one or a few occurrences of a specific phenomenon with the objective to provide a detailed analysis of events, relationships and processes (Denscombe 2007:35). Colten and Covert's (2007:372) viewpoint that case studies are often utilised to compare *theory* and *practice* is used in this study, as the case study approach is applied to determine whether crisis communication in practice is *strategic* to contribute to effective crisis communication with the media. Thereby corresponding or contradicting the existing literature that indicates that there is a lack of strategic crisis processes.

Stake (2004:237-238) and Berg (2004:255-256), inter alia, argue that there are three types of case studies, namely intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies. *Intrinsic case studies* are conducted when the researcher wishes to obtain more information about a specific case (the case itself is of interest). *Instrumental case studies* are performed to provide clarification or further insight into an issue or refinement of the theory. It is therefore of secondary importance because it serves a facilitating role to supplement our understanding of an issue. A *collective case study* is an instrumental case study that is extended over numerous cases and is most applicable to this study as the case is explored in order to refine or support the literature that was obtained prior to the implementation of the research.

Furthermore, Berg (2004:256) differentiates between three case study *design types*, including explanatory, descriptive and exploratory. An *explanatory case study* type is when various sections of information from the same case are related to a certain theoretical proposal. In a *descriptive case study*, the researcher provides a descriptive theory that will serve as foundation for the remaining study. An *exploratory case study* is characterised by conducting a literature study prior to defining the research question. Thus, a certain organisational framework has been developed before conducting the research (Berg 2004:256). For the purpose of this study, an *exploratory* case study design is utilised, as strategic crisis communication and management were explored and various crisis communication and management processes and theories were analysed in the previous chapters, from which the research arguments evolved.

4.2.2.2 Advantages and disadvantages of case studies

Case studies hold the following main advantages: it is explanatory in nature and provide rich longitudinal information about individuals or situations (Lindegger 2006:461); it enables the researcher to uncover underlying patterns and elements not necessarily achievable through other research methods

(Berg 2004:251); it is descriptive (Babbie 2007:298; Colton & Covert 2007:372); it allows the researcher to use various data sources which facilitates the justification of data through *triangulation* (Denscombe 2007:45); and case study researchers enter the field with prior knowledge (through the literature explored) before conducting the research (Fouché 2005:272). The latter advantage could also serve as a disadvantage of the case study method as it can bring about researcher bias, which is also a disadvantage identified with qualitative research. By studying the literature beforehand, it can result in the researcher asking leading questions that might cause the participant to answer in favour of the researcher's statements. Furthermore, Lindegger (2006:461) states that the case study method could propose problems with information validity, because underlying links are difficult to test and generalisations cannot be made from solitary case studies.

Another disadvantage associated with the case study approach is that the ability to generalise the study is questionable (Denscombe 2007:45; Bryman 2001:50) and the researcher has to clearly demonstrate how the particular study correlates with or contradicts similar cases. Furthermore, Denscombe (2007:46) argues that to negotiate access to the case study setting could be difficult and case studies have the risk of producing the 'observer effect', referring to participants behaving differently knowing that they are being studied.

The exploration of the case study involves various data collection methods, which entails information sources that are rich in context and include, among others, interviews, documents, observations and archival records (Fouché 2005:272). For the purpose of this study, a one-on-one personal interview and focus group were utilised as data collection methods, which will be addressed in Item 4.4.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Mouton (2002:107) argues that the main aim of a research design is to allow the researcher to anticipate suitable research decisions to maximise the validity of the research findings. This section will focus on defining the unit of analysis and population with specific reference to the target population, the sampling method and size, as well as the realised sample for the purpose of this study.

4.3.1 Defining the unit of analysis

The unit of analysis refers to the *objects about which you would like to answer your research question* (Dane 1990:176) or *the entities under study...it is 'the what' or whom to be described or analysed* (Singleton, Straits & Miller-Straits 1998:136). It is those elements that are examined to create summary descriptions of all such elements as well as to highlight the differences among these elements (Babbie et al 2007:85). There are seven universal 'unit of analysis' categories (Mouton 2002:91), namely individuals, organisations, institutions, collectives, social objects, social actions or events and interventions. Furthermore, Singleton et al (1998:136) and Bernard (2000:45) state that the unit of analysis is determined prior to defining the population, as the researcher needs to select a certain set of cases (or units) for the study which depends on the research topic. For the purpose of this study, the unit of analysis is *organisations*.

4.3.2 The target population

As stated in Chapter 1, Mouton (2002:135) argues that the process of defining the population is twofold, as a differentiation between the *target population* and the *sampling frame* is required. The target population can be defined as the *universe of units* from which the sample is drawn (Bryman 2001:85), while the *sampling frame* refers to the entirety of all cases from which a sample is drawn (Mouton 2002:135; Bryman 2001:85).

For the purpose of this study, the target population includes financial organisations within South Africa, while the sampling frame comprises the top 10 financial organisations in South Africa. The latter was obtained from Financial Mail's review of South Africa's top listed organisations (based on financial performance) for 2008. It includes financial organisations from various sectors of the financial industry, including the banking, investment and insurance sectors which is collectively referred to as '*financial services providers*'. The organisations that formed part of the selection, in ranking order, were Sanlam, Standard Bank Group, Old Mutual Plc, FirstRand, Absa Group, Nedbank, Liberty Holdings, Liberty Group, Investec and Investec Plc (Lünsche 2008:29-30). Each of these organisations' communication and marketing departments was contacted in order to construct a realised *sample* based on the feedback obtained.

4.3.3 Sampling method and size

Bryman (2001:85) argues that the sample is the section of the population that is chosen for exploration. A *sample* can be defined as a set of units or participants selected from a population, which is compiled to save time and to acquire accurate and unprejudiced estimations of the population status in terms of the research topic (Dane 1990:288; Schofield 2006:26). Furthermore, Schofield (2006:27) states that the sampling method utilised depends on “balancing accuracy against cost and feasibility”.

There are two types of sampling techniques, namely *non-probability sampling* and *probability sampling* (Denscombe 2007:13): Probability sampling is selected when the researcher believes that the units or participants chosen for the sample is representative of the whole population; non-probability sampling is conducted when the researcher does not know whether the sample is representative of the total population. The sampling technique utilised for the purpose of this study is *non-probability sampling* as the researcher cannot determine whether the realised sample represents all South African financial organisations.

There are several methods of non-probability sampling, including snowball, theoretical, quota, purposive and convenience sampling (Denscombe 2007:17-18; Bernard, 2000:174-180). *Snowball sampling* or accidental sampling is utilised when the individuals of the population are difficult to locate and the researcher collects data from the available individuals and request of these individuals to assist in locating other individuals (Babbie et al 2007:167). Should the researcher discover elements that are invalid within the data, *theoretical sampling* can be used, in which only specific aspects of the data are studied to obtain more accurate information (Strydom & Delport 2005:329). A *quota sample* is used to ensure that the population is accurately represented by selecting similar participants; the sample group is thus characterised by specific variables, for example being the same age or gender (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias 2000:168). *Purposive sampling* “involves administering the instrument to entities that are readily available” (Colton & Covert 2007:322), it relies on human judgement (Bradley 2007:175) and signifies a sample that is a good representative of the phenomenon being studied (Durrheim 2006:50). When compiling a purposive sample it can either be a *known group or judgement sample* or a *quota sample* (Du Plooy 2002:114-115). Purposive known group or judgement sampling represents a sample when previous knowledge of the population can assist the researcher in compiling a sample based on his or her judgement. In contrast, purposive quota sampling is based on the identified sections within the population in which non-random sampling is conducted in each group

(Reinard 2001:293). Since it is argued that representatives of the communication or marketing departments of these financial services providers will be able to provide valuable insight to the research, specifically because they are responsible for compiling and interpreting the crisis plans, purposive known group or judgement sampling was used for this study.

A convenient sample “is drawn from the unit of analysis that are conveniently available” (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias 2000:168; Du Plooy 2002:114) and is a sample that is available to the researcher due to the accessibility thereof (Bryman 2001:97). Furthermore, it is argued that convenient sampling is particularly useful in exploratory research (Bernard 2000:178), which is the focus of this study.

For the purpose of this study, the sampling method could be described as both *purposive* and *convenient*. The sample is *purposive* for two reasons: Firstly, the focus was specifically on the top ten *financial* institutions in South Africa due to the industry’s vulnerability to crises, as discussed previously. Secondly, the researcher aims to specifically conduct an interview and focus group discussion with participants that work in the *communication* departments. These participants are responsible for developing and implementing crisis communication and management plans within the organisation. Furthermore, the sampling method can also be described as *convenient* based on the accessibility and availability of the institutions to participate in the study.

From the top 10 financial services providers’ marketing and communication departments that were contacted to participate in the study, only the Absa group’s group marketing and corporate affairs department was willing to contribute, which therefore comprises the realised convenient sample for the study.

4.3.4 The realised sample

Based on the research conducted at Absa Towers in Johannesburg, it was found that the Absa group is one of South-Africa’s largest financial services providers, offering banking, assurance and wealth management products and services (Absa group corporate profile 2009). The group is listed on the JSE Limited with its core business conducted in South-Africa. Besides its primacy business in South-Africa, Absa has equity holdings in various banks in Mozambique, Angola and Tanzania (Absa corporate profile...2009). The following statistics were reported on 31 December 2008: “The group

had 680,3 million shares in issue and a market capitalisation of R73,6 billion. The group had assets of R773,8 billion, 1 192 points of presence, 10,7 million customers, excluding African entities, 9 104 automated teller machines and 37 828 permanent employees nationally” (Absa corporate profile...2009).

Absa follows a centralised organisational structure with every department situated at their head office in Johannesburg (Squier 2009). The Group Marketing and Corporate Affairs department currently has 51 employees, with the department divided into specialist communication functions, including Strategic Business Unit Communication, Group Support Function Communication, Stakeholder Management (which includes, among others, media relations and government relations), Corporate Social Investment, Shared Communication Services (which include internal communication and language services) and CEO Communication (Squier 2009).

For the purpose of this study, triangulation was utilised as data collection method, which is defined in the following section.

4.4 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

This section addresses triangulation as data collection method by means of combining an explorative one-on-one interview and focus group. The semi-structured questionnaires utilised for these interviews will also be described in conjunction with the pilot test that was conducted prior to the interviews to test the efficiency of the questionnaire.

4.4.1 Describing triangulation

Although triangulation can specifically refer to the combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (De Vos 2005:361; Bryman 2001:447), triangulation for the purpose of this study will be defined as the combination of different methods or perspectives in order to test the same phenomenon (Chambliss & Schutt 2006:65; Bradley 2007:139; Babbie 2007:113). More specifically, it is a data collection method in which aspects is viewed from various perspectives to obtain a better understanding of the research topic (Denscombe 2007:134).

There are four types of triangulation (Denscombe 2007:135-137; Bradley 2007:139; Kelly 2006a:380; De Vos 2005:362), namely data triangulation, methodological triangulation, investigator triangulation

and theory triangulation. *Data triangulation* refers to the combination of various data sources, for example, an interview and archival materials (De Vos 2005:362). *Methodological triangulation* refers to the combination of different research methods, usually through the combination of qualitative and quantitative research, to study a single phenomenon (De Vos 2005:362). Another viewpoint on methodological triangulation is held by Denscombe (2007:135) who argues that methodological triangulation can be divided into methodological triangulation *between methods* and methodological triangulation *within methods*: Methodological triangulation between methods enables the researcher to draw a contrast between the two different research methods' findings (qualitative and quantitative research), while methodological triangulation within methods allows the researcher to draw comparisons between similar research methods. *Investigator triangulation* introduces the use of different investigators to guard against researcher bias, ensure consistency (Denscombe 2007:136) and to achieve inter-subjective agreement (De Vos 2005:362). *Theory triangulation* refers to using different theoretical perspectives in order to shape the data collected (Denscombe 2007:136; De Vos 2005:362). For the purpose of this study, *data triangulation* is applied, as two different data collection methods (one-on-one interview and focus group) are combined. Using data triangulation increases the validity of the research (Denscombe 2007:136).

The following advantages and disadvantages of triangulation as data collection method are tabulated in Table 4.2 (Denscombe 2007:137-138; Stake 2000:444; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias 2000:189-190; Mouton 2002:156):

Table 4.2: The advantages and disadvantages of triangulation

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher obtains a better <i>knowledge</i> of the research topic which can either produce: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Improved accuracy</i>: This is a means of validating the accuracy and dependability of the findings. It is used to measure the confirmation of the findings derived from the different data collection methods. ▪ <i>A fuller picture</i>: This will produce additional data to enhance the completeness of the findings. Thus, triangulation is used to compliment data from other resources. • By using different methods that complement one another, the shortcomings of each method can be balanced out. • It clarifies meaning by discovering multiple ways in which the phenomenon is being viewed. • If similar findings are obtained from the various methods used, it will increase the validity of the study. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher is often obliged to make certain sacrifices (for example time or monetary sacrifices) to accommodate different research methods. • Data analysis is more complex. • It is regarded as a risky data collection method as the findings of the various methods used could contradict one another instead of complementing one another. • Should the findings of the various methods used not be consistent, it reduces the validity of the research and the study has to be re-examined.

The one-on-one interview and focus group supplemented one another, as the interview specifically analysed whether Absa's crisis communication processes and strategies are strategic and how sustainable stakeholder relationships are built. This served as an introduction and foundation for the focus group that analysed crisis communication with the media specifically. This again is linked to the theoretical paradigms proposal in the preceding theoretical chapters. These two data collection methods is addressed in the following two sub-sections, followed by a discussion on the semi-structured questionnaires used during the one-on-one interview and focus group, with specific reference on clarifying the various questionnaire categories. A discussion on the pilot test that was conducted to measure the reliability of the one-on-one questionnaire is subsequently addressed.

4.4.1.1 One-on-one interview

An exploratory one-on-one interview, using a semi-structured questionnaire was conducted with Liezl Squier, Acting Manager: Chief Executive Communication for the Absa group. The aim of the interview was to evaluate whether Absa's crisis communication processes are strategic and what measures, if any, are utilised to build sustainable stakeholder relationships.

A qualitative one-on-one interview or face-to-face interview can be defined as "a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the participant" (Babbie 2007:306). Furthermore, Babbie (2007:306) argues that an interview allows the participant to do most of the talking and that it is a good data collection method to obtain a better understanding of the participant's viewpoint of the topic being studied. Gomm (2004:176) also highlights that a one-on-one interview assists the researcher to gather information about the participant specifically. Therefore, the interview allowed the researcher to obtain the participant's perspective on strategic crisis communication.

Greeff (2005:292) argues that one-on-one interviews can either be *unstructured* or *semi-structured*. The unstructured one-on-one interview aims to formalise conversation with the absence of predetermined questions, whereas the semi-structured interview is partially guided by predetermined questions. Furthermore, the one-on-one interview can also be *structured* or *standardised* (Bernard 2000:230; Bryman 2001:107), in which the questions are very specific and only allows the participants a fixed range of answers. The degree of structure for the purpose of this study is determined by the *interview*

questionnaire or schedule. A semi-structured interview format or focused interview (Dane 1990:129) is followed by using a *semi-structured questionnaire* which is discussed in Item 4.4.3.

Despite obtaining data-rich insights from the participants' viewpoint, as argued earlier, semi-structured interviews are usually time-consuming and can become intense, depending on the research topic (Greeff 2005:297). Semi-structured interviews work best when the researcher interviews managers of organisations who are accustomed to efficient time management (Bernard 2000:191). As senior managers of Absa's communication department were interviewed, it was argued that a semi-structured interview is the most suitable data collection method for the purpose of this study. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview has the advantage of not only demonstrating that the researcher is in control of the interview, but also leaves room for new leads (Bernard 2000:191).

The one-on-one interview was recorded using a dictaphone with prior permission from the participant, after which the interview was transcribed. Although being recorded might cause the participant to feel uncomfortable, Kelly (2006b:298) argues that the advantages of interview recording are that the researcher is not sidetracked by note-keeping, it provides the researcher with a complete record of the interview, and shows that the researcher has an interest in the participants' answers.

A *synergistic output* is sometimes difficult to achieve with one-on-one data collection methods (Herndon 1993:41), therefore, a focus group was used to supplement the findings obtained from the one-on-one interview. These findings are highlighted in the following section.

4.4.1.2 Focus group

A focus group was conducted in conjunction with the one-on-one interview to specifically measure Absa's crisis communication processes with the media. The focus group comprised seven senior communication managers situated in Absa's Group Marketing and Communication department. According to Herndon (1993:41), "focus group interviews used in triangulation with another qualitative method such as individual interviews", which is the purpose of this study, "may provide information otherwise inaccessible".

A focus group is a data collection method that utilises *group dynamics* through a small group of people, usually six to twelve (Du Plooy 2002:180), brought together by a researcher or moderator (Denscombe

2007:178) to stimulate interaction and so create meaning (Bryman 2001:336). The core characteristics of a focus group outlined by Herndon (1993:40) are the utilisation of multiple participants that work together; interaction among participants; and the presence of a researcher that guides the discussion with a research schedule or questionnaire. Despite the utilisation of a research schedule or questionnaire to guide the discussion, a focus group is less structured and more impulsive than a one-on-one interview (Herndon 1993:41).

A focus group has the advantages of producing “data rich ideas” from the participants’ points of view (Du Plooy 2002:178) and group interaction that stimulate certain viewpoints that are not normally available (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:150). Furthermore, Greeff (2005:300) stipulates that “focus groups are fundamentally a way of listening to people and learning from them, and creating lines of communication”. Therefore, in order to accommodate the spontaneous nature of the focus group, a semi-structured questionnaire was utilised to allow unplanned discussions, ensuring that the researcher obtains first-hand insights from communication experts on how they manage communication with the media during a crisis. Thus, the significance of conducting a focus group for this study is that the researcher not only benefits from individual answers, but also obtains further insights from the discussions that evolve in a group (Van der Walt & Breett-van Niekerk 2006:347).

In order to save time, the focus group was also recorded with prior permission from the participants. To avoid possible confusion during data analysis, all participants identified themselves before providing an answer, as suggested by Du Plooy (2002:180), and the participants answered questions one at a time. After recording, the conversation was transcribed as Bernard (2000:211) argues that focus group interviews have to be transcribed in order to capture rich data.

In addition and to the findings obtained from the one-on-one interview and focus group, and to serve as foundation for the analysis of these findings, Absa’s draft crisis communication plan is included in the analysis in the following chapter. Data has therefore been collected from *three* qualitative methods, namely Absa’s draft crisis communication plan, the one-on-one interview and the focus group.

4.4.2 Semi-structured questionnaires

For both the one-on-one interview and focus group, semi-structured questionnaires or interview schedules have been compiled to guide the researcher during data collection. The reason for utilising

semi-structured questionnaires was to guide the researcher during the interviews and simultaneously allow the researcher to encourage further discussions that are not necessarily stipulated in the questionnaire (Bernard 2000:191).

In this section, the semi-structured questionnaire is firstly described, followed by a discussion on the questionnaire categories used for both the one-on-one interview and the focus group.

4.4.2.1 Describing the semi-structured questionnaire

In general, an interview schedule or questionnaire can be described as a benchmark schedule that is utilised for each participant, in which the questions are asked in the same wording and order (Wilson & Sapsford 2006:93; Bernard 2000:191). It is an instrument designed to *elicit information that will be useful for analysis* (Babbie 2007:245). Structuring a questionnaire prior to the interview force researchers to think overtly about what they intend to achieve throughout the interview (Greeff 2005:296).

A semi-structured questionnaire has the following characteristics (Drever 1995:13): the key questions stipulated by the interviewer constitute the overall interview structure; prompts (encouraging broad coverage) and probes (in-depth exploration of answers) fill in the structure; there is a combination of open and closed questions; and the participant has freedom of speech but the interviewer can assert control when needed. Although it is stated that a semi-structured questionnaire is characterised by a combination of open and closed questions, the questions for both the interview and focus group were predominantly *open-ended*. Therefore, the questionnaires were regarded as semi-structured, as it guided the researcher during the interviews while simultaneously allowing new discussions to develop. Open-ended questions can be defined as questions for which the participants are requested to give subjective answers (Singleton et al 1998: 283; Babbie 2007:246). Open-ended questions have the advantage of providing the participants with the freedom to answer, which could elicit data rich insights highlighting the participants' thought processes and the strength of their perceptions and opinions (Singleton et al 1998:283). On the contrary, open-ended questions have the disadvantage of difficult and time consuming data analysis (Singleton et al 1998:284).

As stipulated in the previous paragraph, *prompts* and *probes* are allowed by the semi-structured questionnaire. Prompts are applied to direct the interview to what the participant knows but has not yet

mentioned, without putting words in their mouths (Drever 1995:23). A prompt should therefore never suggest certain answers. Probes focus on the development of certain answers through clarification, confirmation or explanation, while prompts stimulate “different answers of the same kind” (Drever 1995:23). Greeff (2005:296) argues that within semi-structured interviews, the researcher has to determine which topics have to be addressed in the questionnaire, and subsequently compile appropriate questions to address these topics. Furthermore, the questions should follow a logical order from broad to specific, ensuring that the participants gradually become accustomed to the research topic (Greeff 2005:297).

The semi-structured one-on-one interview questionnaire only served as a *guideline* – therefore it did not dictate the interview (Greeff 2005:296). This questionnaire specifically measured the level of strategy and stakeholder relationship building within Absa’s crisis communication plans. A different semi-structured questionnaire that specifically measured crisis communication with the media was utilised to guide the focus group, attached as Addendum D. This questionnaire was also only used as a framework to stimulate discussion and new insights, as the focus group is characterised by a more spontaneous structure.

Various interview categories with acorganisationing questions were compiled for each questionnaire which is discussed below.

4.4.2.2 An explanation of the semi-structured questionnaire categories

The categories of each questionnaire will be discussed in detail to support the reporting and interpretations of the findings in Chapter 5.

- One-on-one interview questionnaire categories

Although this research mainly set out to determine whether crisis communication can be applied and categorised as proactive, reactive and post-evaluative in the crisis management process to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media, other aspects to instil a *comprehensive* strategic crisis communication process were also identified. These aspects are outlined in the strategic crisis communication mind map discussed previously. These elements were especially evident in the *excellence theory* and *IC* literature and were used as the core drivers in the one-on-one interview

questionnaire. The application of each element in terms of the proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages was measured. The one-on-one interview was *exploratory* and specifically conducted to test whether Absa's crisis communication process is *strategic* and what procedures, if any, was utilised to build strategic stakeholder relationships. This questionnaire was divided into the following categories:

a) General introductory questions

The general introductory questions did not measure strategic crisis communication directly, but were used to explore the key concepts of the study, which therefore served as grounding for the measurement of the research problem. The participants' input was required on the following concepts:

Table 4.3: Explanation of the general introductory question category concepts

Category	Explanation
Strategy	It was important to determine what the participant's definition of strategy and the core elements of a strategic process are, as this influences their perception on the importance of strategic crisis management and communication processes.
The importance of communication in the organisation	The participant's perception on the importance and strategic role of communication within the organisation subsequently address the importance and relevance of strategic crisis communication.
Organisational stakeholders	Because a crucial part of strategic crisis communication is to build sustainable stakeholder relationships, the participant's viewpoint on the importance of stakeholder interaction in general was measured to determine how stakeholder relationships with the media are built. It was not just important to determine whether stakeholder relationships are built, but also <i>how</i> these relationships, if any, are built.
The reciprocal relationship between crisis communication and crisis management	As the study argues that the crisis communication process is built on and encapsulates the crisis management process (which is a proactive, reactive and post-evaluative process as addressed in the literature chapters), it was vital to obtain the participant's input on the relationship between crisis communication and crisis management, as the literature does not display a definite reciprocal relationship.
The crisis communication process	It was important to determine whether crisis communication is regarded as a proactive, reactive, post-evaluative or combined process in order to contribute towards strategic crisis communication. This category is based on the argument posed in the literature that in order for a crisis communication process to be strategic, it has to be a <i>combined</i> process, thereby having proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages.
Operating in the financial industry and the involvement of the media in crisis situations	As the literature indicates that the financial industry is a sensitive industry, it was necessary to obtain the participants' insights on whether the financial industry is more susceptible to crises, compared to other industries. This section also aims to determine how important is it to respond to media queries and whether the media is the formulator of public opinion. These questions therefore specifically focus on clarifying the <i>case study</i> .

b) Questions aiming to measure strategic crisis communication

These questions specifically aim to establish whether Absa has a *comprehensive* crisis communication process through the incorporation of IC and excellence theory variables. Various IC and excellence theory variables that mainly contribute towards strategic crisis communication were used. The existence of each variable during proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis management stages was also evaluated. As stipulated in the previous chapter, the IC and the excellence theory variables are intertwined, as excellence theory principles are necessary for IC and vice versa. For example, in order to build sustainable stakeholder relationships (which are an IC variable) two-way communication (an excellence theory variable) has to be practiced. The excellence theory and IC variables selected were specifically chosen to supplement one another and therefore, not all the IC and excellence theory characteristics, as indicated in the literature, are used.

The following variables of the *excellence theory*, as outlined in the literature, were measured: Strategic management of a crisis communication program; access to senior management; two-way symmetrical communication; participative organisational culture; symmetrical internal communication; organic organisational structure; and the recognition that the organisation operates in a volatile environment. *IC* variables that were measured were: sustainable stakeholder relationship building; stakeholder focus; purposeful interactivity; organisational mission marketing; cross-functional departmental expertise integration; and the combination of internal and external communication.

c) Concluding questions

These questions have the same purpose as the general introductory questions, thereby supporting the argument of *strategic* crisis communication and stakeholder relationship building. As the second research objective aims to highlight the need for an integrated crisis communication framework to instil strategic crisis communication with the media, the closing questions specifically focus on whether IC could instil strategic crisis communication. It was also vital to obtain insight as to what criteria need to be present to ensure successful crisis communication. This one-on-one interview questionnaire is attached as Addendum C.

- Focus group questionnaire categories

A different semi-structured questionnaire was used for the focus group, categorising the key aspects that should constitute strategic crisis communication with the media. The objective of this focus group was to specifically measure crisis communication with the *media* and to supplement the answers obtained from the one-on-one interview that specifically focused on strategy and stakeholder relationships.

The questionnaire was predominantly open ended and also included questions from which the participants had to select and motivate the most appropriate answer in order to expedite and guide the interview process. The questionnaire utilised similar categories as the one-on-one interview but specifically measured these concepts against the media as stakeholder group. The questions were categorised as follows: strategic communication; IC; excellence theory elements; stakeholder engagement and two-way communication; and crisis communication with the media. A brief explanation of these categories is provided in the following table:

Table 4.4: Explanation of the focus group questionnaire categories

Category	Explanation
Strategic communication	To obtain insight on the participants' comprehension of strategy in order to supplement the answers obtained from the one-on-one interview.
IC and excellence theory elements	To determine whether IC and excellence theory principles could contribute towards strategic (crisis) communication with the media.
Stakeholder engagement and two-way communication	To obtain insight on the participants' comprehension on how sustainable media relationships are built and the role that two-way communication plays in this process.
Crisis communication with the media	To determine whether crisis communication is practiced proactively, reactively or post-evaluatively (the three crisis management stages) and which aspects contribute towards the success or failure of crisis communication with the media.

This focus group questionnaire is attached as Addendum D. A pilot test was executed to test the efficiency of the semi-structured questionnaire, which will be discussed in the following section.

4.4.3 Pilot test

A pilot test was conducted prior to the one-on-one interview to test the workability of the questionnaire and to highlight areas that need to be improved or clarified. A pilot test or investigation can be defined as a trial conducted prior to the core investigation in order to evaluate the sufficiency of the research design, data collection methods and questionnaires utilised (Wilson & Sapsford 2006:103). According

to Kanjee (2006:490), pilot tests are utilised to “identify possible problems with proposed research...with either a sub-sample of the proposed sample or a small sample representative of the proposed sample”. Delpont (2005:171-172) argues that it is essential to pilot test a questionnaire prior to the actual investigation, as ambiguous questions could lead to incomparable findings, leading questions could cause biased responses and unclear questions will produce unclear answers.

The pilot test was conducted via email with Evan Bloom, a well known crisis communication expert and founder of the Crisis Communication Consultancy and Managing Director of the sister organisation, Strategy One Communications, to specifically measure the workability of the one-on-one questionnaire. Bloom published various literature on crisis communication (Bloom 2008a; Bloom 2008b; Bloom 2001; Verwey et al 2002) and specifically follows a proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication structure within this consultancy (How we work...2009). Although Bloom was not representative of the financial industry sample (which is normally a prerequisite of a pilot test as stipulated above) he was specifically selected to provide insights into the research topic and to indicate which areas of the questionnaire need to be improved in order to successfully measure the research problem. Consequently, Bloom was selected to participate in the pilot test based on his crisis communication knowledge and expertise. The necessary adjustments to clarify certain questions and to avoid ambiguity were made to the one-on-one questionnaire.

The pilot test, among others, contributed towards the reliability of the research. Other aspects that also added to the reliability and validity of the research are discussed in the following section.

4.5 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Reliability and validity are two important measurement concepts (Delpont 2005:160; Bryman 2001:29). This section firstly describes reliability, then validity, followed by a discussion on the measures that were implemented to increase the reliability and validity of this study.

4.5.1 Research reliability

Reliability is the degree to which the research findings can be imitated or duplicated by another researcher or when similar findings can be obtained by repeating the study (Bernard 2000:47; Denzin & Lincoln 1994:100). Similarly, reliability is described as the constancy and accuracy of the measuring instrument; it is the degree to which the exact instrument yields the same results repetitively (Durrheim

& Painter 2006:152; Babbie et al 2007:119). Delpont (2005:163) further states that a pilot test is an important procedure to increase the reliability of the study. It is also important to pre-test the questions of the interview for clarity and possible bias (Berg 1995:56).

Reliability is therefore concerned with *how well* a phenomenon is being measured (Delpont 2005:163) and according to Bryman (2001:29), it is predominantly an evaluation instrument used in quantitative research as quantitative researchers are concerned with the constancy of the measuring instrument. However, Delpont (2005:163) says “high reliability does not guarantee valid results, but there can be no valid results without reliability”.

4.5.2 Research validity

Validity refers to the degree to which an *empirical measure* accurately reflects the actual meaning of the phenomenon being studied (Babbie 2007:146) as well as the precision and trustworthiness of the data collection method, data and findings and is the most important measuring concept in social research (Bernard 2000:46). According to Bryman (2001:30), validity focuses on the *integrity* of the research findings.

There are four categories of validity, namely content, face, criterion and construct validity (Delpont 2005:160-162). *Content validity* measures the representativeness of the content of the interview, and is a judgemental process. The researcher has to determine whether the selected instrument actually measures the intended concept. For the purpose of this study a pilot test was conducted to measure the accuracy of the questionnaire. *Face validity* has to be utilised to ensure that the measuring instrument accurately measures the elements under construction. Consequently, the researcher had to ensure that the one-on-one interview and focus group questionnaire are proficient to measure the level of strategy within Absa’s crisis communication plan. The nature of qualitative research ultimately allows the researcher to obtain various perceptions from the participant regarding strategic crisis communication. *Criterion validity* implies that the selected measuring instrument has to be compared with an alternative measuring instrument that is reliable. The researcher utilised a one-on-one interview in which the answers and feedback obtained were compared and integrated with the answers obtained from the focus group. The last validity measurement, *construct validity*, measures the extent to which an instrument effectively measures the theoretical construct. As this category of validity is a complex procedure due to the abstract nature of constructs (Delpont 2005:162) this was not applied for the purpose of this study.

When similar results are obtained from different research methods, the validity and reliability of the research methods are increased (Chambliss & Schutt 2006:66; Hickson & Jennings 1993:149). Furthermore, Denscombe (2007:138) states that triangulation provides the advantage of focusing on the “validation of the findings in terms of their accuracy and authenticity”.

A key concern with a case study approach, according to Bryman (2001:50), is that the *external validity* or *generalisability* of the study will be questionable. A single case cannot be representative of similar cases. However, Bryman (2001:50) argues that in general case study researchers understand that a single case study cannot be used to represent a range of objects. In addition, Denscombe (2007:43) states that the following aspects can be used as a defence against the belief that one cannot generalise from case study findings. Firstly, despite the distinctiveness of some case studies, it is also an example of a broader class of phenomena. Secondly, “the extent to which findings from the case study can be generalised to other examples in the class depends on how far the case study example is similar to others of its type” (Denscombe 2007:43). Lastly, some of the responsibility to make generalisations on a certain case study lies with the reader, based on the information supplied by the researcher. However, the core value of the case study for this study is that it allows the researcher to obtain insights from participants that have first-hand experience with the phenomenon being studied, and therefore sets a benchmark for similar future studies.

According to Du Plooy (2002:182-184), when peoples’ attitudes, feelings, knowledge or views are studied, which is the focus of this study, the validity of these methods could be affected due to certain factors, which can collectively be referred to as *extraneous factors*. These factors might be that the participants feel uneasy to answer questions due to the presence of the other participants, or they might feel uncomfortable with the researcher. Furthermore, time constraints could be a problem when conducting the interviews.

4.5.3 Contributions towards a reliable and valid study

Despite the abovementioned problems, the following guidelines were considered in this study to minimise possible difficulties with the research (Du Plooy 2002:183-184). Firstly, the researcher ensured that the questions posed relate directly to the research objective, and irrelevant questions were avoided. Secondly, questions were unambiguous and not misleading or confusing. Thirdly, the conditions under which the interviews were conducted were similar to the participants’ everyday

surroundings. Fourthly, structured questions were used as far as possible. Fifthly, the researcher was trained in order to conduct the interview sufficiently. The questions and time of the interview were pre-tested by a pilot study. Lastly, a full record of the one-on-one interview was transcribed.

Furthermore, in this study, the possible risk that the participants might have felt uneasy to answer certain questions, due to the presence of the other participants, was minimised as the interviews were conducted at the participants' workplace, which created a comfortable interview environment. It can also be argued that the participants were not intimidated by each other as they work with one another on a daily basis. However, the researcher still faced the risk that the participants might have felt uncomfortable with the topic during the interviews. The researcher endeavoured to eliminate the latter by sending the questionnaires to the participants prior to the interviews to ensure that they are comfortable with the research topic.

To overcome possible time constraints, the interview and focus group discussion were recorded and transcribed as opposed to taking notes, and by semi-structuring the questionnaire instead of utilising an unstructured questionnaire. The semi-structured format also allowed prompts and probes, and therefore did not restrict the participants to certain answers. Although the research methods were time-consuming, it produced data rich insights.

Furthermore, a pilot test was conducted to eliminate questions that might be misleading or ambiguous which also contributed to make the study more reliable. The questions were specifically related to addressing the research problem and irrelevant questions were avoided at all times. The questions formulated for the focus group were significantly re-structured in order to simplify the answering process, as the focus group has a more spontaneous structure. Additionally, triangulation increased the validity of this study should similar findings from the two data collection methods be obtained. Although the realised sample was small, triangulation also contributed to making the findings more reliable.

The following section addresses the data analysis through the utilisation of Miles and Huberman's (1994:10-12) data analysis method.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is focused on extracting the underlying meaning from the data obtained (Denscombe 2008:247). Because the study is qualitative of nature, a qualitative data analysis method was applied, characterised by language and text analysis which is generally progressive, iterative and repetitive (Gibbs 2004:1) and involves manners to study social research without converting it into a statistical format (Babbie 2007:378).

Qualitative data analysis is mainly based on four principles as identified by Denscombe (2008:287). Firstly, the data analysis and conclusions have to be grounded on the evidence that has been collected. Secondly, the researcher's explanation of the phenomenon has to be derived from carefully reading the empirical data. Thirdly, the researcher has to guard against including preconceptions into the data analysis, which might arise from the researcher's knowledge obtained in the literature study. Lastly, data analysis should be an iterative process – it is a process that constantly moves back and forth, comparing the empirical data with the predetermined categories and concepts of the study.

As stated previously, the one-one-one interview and focus group discussion were recorded and transcribed. Miles and Huberman's (1994:10-12) data analysis method is used to subjectively analyse the data obtained from the one-on-one interview and focus group as this method regards data analysis as a threefold, synchronised process of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman 1994:10). These steps should be considered as a cyclical, interlinked process occurring before, during and after data collection, which represents the continuous, iterative nature of qualitative data analysis (Miles & Huberman 1994:11-12). Each of these steps will be addressed in the following sub-sections:

4.6.1 Data reduction

During this step, the probable universe of the data is considered (De Vos 1998:340). It involves a “form of data analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards and organises data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified” (Miles & Huberman 1994:11). Data reduction even occurs before data collection, as the researcher decides what the core of the research will be (Huberman & Miles 1994:11). It even becomes part of the data collection process through possible summary writing, concept testing or cluster generation (Miles & Huberman 1994:10). Qualitative data can be reduced

through selection, paraphrasing or summaries (Miles & Huberman 1994:11). For the purpose of this study, data was reduced through key theoretical concept categories as highlighted previously.

4.6.2 Data display

The second flow of analysis is data display. Miles and Huberman (1994:11) define a 'display' as a structured assembly of data that allows taking action as well as drawing conclusions. For the researcher to understand the meaning of the data, it has to be reduced (De Vos 1998:340). Similar to data reduction, data display forms part of the data analysis process – it is not a separate activity (Miles & Huberman 1994:11). To compare the information obtained during the interviews and focus group, a prominent keyword of each of the questionnaire categories of each participant was highlighted to gather significant conclusions.

4.6.3 Conclusion drawing and verification

This step involves the interpretation and comprehension of the displayed data (De Vos 1998:340). Conclusions are continuously drawn right through the whole research process, but final conclusions may not be drawn until data collection is over (Miles & Huberman 1994:11). The conclusions or meanings derived from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, therefore their validity (Miles & Huberman 1994:11). Based on the conclusions drawn from the previous step, the researcher added subjective perceptions and aligned it with the theoretical concepts discussed in the literature chapters.

4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter highlighted the methodological framework required to determine whether crisis communication processes are strategic in *practice* to facilitate effective crisis communication with the media. This framework was measured against the utilisation of proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages and the existence of IC and excellence theory variables. From the 10 South African financial services providers' sample, only Absa was willing to participate in the study, which therefore comprised the *realised sample* for the study.

As the aim of the study is to obtain insights from communication practitioners who are responsible for planning and implementing crisis communication plans, a qualitative case study approach was applied as it is argued that it could produce data rich ideas from the participants' viewpoint. A case study

approach assisted the researcher to obtain first-hand insights as to what the various challenges are towards practicing strategic crisis communication.

Triangulation was used as data collection method through an exploratory one-on-one interview, to measure the level of strategy and stakeholder relationship building in Absa's crisis communication plans. This was supported by a focus group to specifically evaluate crisis communication with the media. For both data collection methods, a semi-structured questionnaire was used to guide the interview and focus group. A pilot test was conducted with crisis communication expert Evan Bloom, to measure the adequacy of the questionnaire for the one-on-one interview, and to ensure that the questionnaire measures what it intended to in an understandable, unambiguous manner.

It was indicated that utilisation of a pilot test, amongst others, contributed towards the reliability of the study as it ensured that the questionnaire was understandable and unbiased. Although the sample only comprised one South African financial services provider, data triangulation was applied in order to ensure a more reliable and valid study which can serve as benchmark for future studies.

In the following chapter, the data from the one-on-one interview and focus group will be analysed according to the theoretical underpinning of the study, by organising the data into four interpretation categories, namely strategic communication, excellence theory, IC and strategic crisis communication with the media. The key responses, in relation to the theory and subjective interpretations of the findings of each category will also be outlined. This will be done by organising the data from each interpretation category into three sections, namely key responses, relation to theory and subjective interpretations.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

“Crisis communication becomes strategic when communicators have the ability to advise top management on the outcome of their business decisions.” (Focus group participant 2009).

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the research methodology required to determine whether crisis communication processes in practice are strategic, to ensure effective crisis communication with the media. The methodological framework enabled the researcher to firstly measure whether these processes combine proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages (as part of the crisis management process) and secondly, whether IC and excellence theory variables are applied to facilitate a comprehensive strategic communication process.

This chapter presents data analysis and findings obtained from evaluating Absa’s crisis communication process with the media. The results are aligned with the theoretical grounding of this study which emphasises the need for an integrated crisis communication framework to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media; thereby drawing a correlation between theory and practice.

In line with this study’s objectives, this chapter aims to address sub-problem three as outlined in Chapter 1: *To determine whether crisis communication in practice can be proactively, reactively and post-evaluatively applied and categorised as part of the crisis management process in order to contribute towards strategic crisis communication with the media.*

Prior to this chapter’s discussion, it is vital to highlight that thus far the three crisis communication stages were discussed as part of the crisis management process in order to underline the reciprocal relationship between crisis management and crisis communication. However, as the focus of this study is on crisis communication specifically, for the remainder of this study reference will be made to the strategic crisis *communication* process consisting of proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages.

This chapter analyses the findings obtained from the one-on-one interview and focus group according to four analysis categories, namely strategic communication, excellence theory, IC, and strategic crisis

communication with the media, (which is a derivative of the previous three categories). The key responses and findings, the relation to theory and subjective interpretations of each category is outlined. Firstly, however, Absa's provisional crisis communication plan will be critically analysed to serve as foundation for the findings obtained from the one-on-one interview and focus group.

5.2 FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

This section focuses on analysing Absa's draft crisis communication plan, followed by subjectively analysing the data obtained from the focus group and one-on-one interview.

5.2.1 Critical analysis of Absa's provisional crisis communication plan

The components from Absa's provisional crisis communication plan are discussed briefly, with an in-depth focus on the measures implemented to facilitate successful crisis communication with the *media* specifically. It should, however, be stipulated that this crisis communication plan is *only a draft document and has not been accepted and implemented* by the Absa Group. Due to the confidential nature of the draft document, a copy could not be included in this study. The analysis of this plan will serve only as a guide to underline the whole of Absa group's comprehension of crisis communication procedures, and serve as foundation and enhancement for the data obtained from the focus group and one-on-one interview.

This discussion presents a critical analysis of the core components of the crisis communication plan in terms of the theoretical underpinning of this study, by categorising these components as either a component of the proactive, reactive or post-evaluative crisis communication stage. As argued previously, existence of proactive, reactive, and post-evaluative crisis communication stages is a determinant of a strategic process.

The crisis communication plan, developed by an external crisis communication specialist, Alan Arguile (Arguile 2009:1-68), focuses on managing and preventing *reputational risks* due to the fundamental role that public confidence plays in financial organisations (Arguile 2009:9). The plan is built on the core idea that it is "imperative that organisations proactively manage their reputation through an ongoing, integrated approach to risk management" (Arguile 2009:8) and that crisis communication must be developed in line with eight key communication principles (Arguile 2009:31-32). Each principle is discussed below in relation to the arguments posed in the literature review.

a) Absa is transparent and proactive: *It is argued that a good reputation is built on transparency. For Absa to be perceived as an open and transparent organisation, all relevant information must be communicated openly and proactively.* As outlined in the literature, Stocker (1997:197) and Modzelewski (1990:13), state that a favourable corporate reputation prior to a crisis can assist the organisation to better manage a crisis. However, this favourable corporate reputation will not be established through one-way proactive crisis communication; *two-way symmetrical communication* should be practiced to build and maintain stakeholder relationships (Grunig & Grunig 1992:289; Ristino 2001:3) which will enhance an organisation's perceived level of openness and transparency.

b) Absa's communication is based on facts: *Crisis communication has to be based on facts (not providing misleading information) in order to build and sustain an environment of trust and ethical behaviour. Furthermore, Absa has to guard against making unrealistic promises – all actions have to be valid.* As stipulated in the literature, Fearn-Banks (2007:43) also argues that all the facts regarding the crisis should be gathered prior to communicating to key stakeholders, as the organisation will be perceived as unreliable if information is disseminated as facts when it has not been confirmed.

c) Absa's communication is consistent: *All communication during a crisis should be constant, as any comment by an employee could be regarded as an official statement of Absa's position. Furthermore, although one has to communicate to various stakeholder groups, the message should be consistent.* This could be achieved by keeping all stakeholders informed throughout the crisis. Stakeholders must constantly be reminded of how organisational activities influence their interests positively and that the organisation acts in their best interest (Heath 2008:13). Furthermore, as argued by Fearn-Banks (2007:25), consistency in crisis communication could be increased by using one designated spokesperson to ensure communication 'out of one mouth'.

d) Absa treats all stakeholders with equal respect: *All stakeholders must be informed simultaneously of the relevant facts of a crisis. It is argued that this will also ensure high employee morale. It is vital for all stakeholders to receive updates of the latest developments of the crisis from Absa directly and not from third parties – especially not the media. Stakeholders should be kept in cooperative balance with the organisation (Lerbinger 1997:330) and should be informed of the latest developments within a crisis. This also highlights the importance of proactive media relationships and providing the media*

with the relevant updates to increase the likelihood of favourable reporting and avoid the misappropriation of facts (Schmidt 2005:11; Dougherty 1992:62).

e) Absa invests in building a reputation for the long-term: *Absa will never exploit indefensible, short-term opportunities during a crisis that could have a negative impact on the group's reputation in future.* This principle also correlates with the principles of communicating all the facts and treating stakeholders with equal respect. When all the facts are communicated proactively to the relevant stakeholder groups, it is likely that Absa will be perceived as credible and honest, thereby strengthening their reputation. Benoit (1997:178) argues that stakeholders' "perceptions are more important than reality", as the focus is on whether stakeholders *believe* the organisation is guilty, not whether the organisation is in fact guilty.

f) Absa provides a professional communication service delivered by professionals: *Timeous and high quality information should be evident in all communication. It is argued that Absa professionals should always communicate with their relevant counterparts (for example, media specialists have to communicate with journalists).* A primary spokesperson should be adequately trained to communicate effectively during a crisis, this reduces the chance of contradicting statements; speaking with one voice is more crucial in a crisis than during normal operations (Fearn-Banks 2007:25). This plan states that this primary spokesperson should be identified as a proactive crisis measure.

g) Absa maintains the right to privacy: *Absa has the right to withhold confidential information about its operational strategies, crisis plans and financial position until it is required to be disclosed.* This principle correlates with an argument by Guth and Marsh (2003:171) who state that the spokesperson or public relations practitioner, when communicating to stakeholders, must be trained to maintain a healthy balance between objectivity and advocacy. Therefore not revealing too much information (objectivity) to bring the organisation under jeopardy, but at the same time not being unethical by revealing too little information (advocacy). The focus, however, should always be to act in favour of the relationships that sustain the organisation (Guth & Marsh 2003:173).

h) Absa defends its position when it is required: *Absa will use all appropriate measures to put their view across in order to rectify inaccurate speculations.* As it is argued that external perceptions are not always consistent with the respective organisation's perception, proactive crisis communication, based

on facts, to all relevant stakeholder groups throughout the crisis is of key importance. This is especially true when communicating to the media, as Li (2007:670) argues that the public is dependent on the media for news during crises and sometimes relies on the media for the planning of life (Ma 2005:242). Moreover, the messages communicated to the media and the messages communicated to other stakeholder groups have to be consistent in order to preserve the organisation's credibility.

The above principles highlighted the importance of gathering all the facts during a crisis, prior to communicating any message. Furthermore, the significance of stakeholder communication during a crisis is also evident. However, the principles do not underline the importance of building sustainable stakeholder relationships through *two-way* communication. Although the principles intend to promote two-way communication, little room for stakeholder feedback is presented.

Although the original plan cannot be attached, a more detailed analysis of the crisis communication plan is attached as Addendum E, in which the aspects specifically relating to crisis communication with the *media* are emphasised. Although not presented as such, the components of this plan were also categorised as being a resemblance of the proposed proactive, reactive or post-evaluative crisis communication stage, to measure the level of strategy in the plan. In the discussion to follow, the latter findings are summarised, where it will be highlighted whether IC and excellence theory variables are practiced to contribute towards measuring this plan's level of strategy.

5.2.1.1 Interpretations on the proposed proactive crisis communication stage

From this analysis it is deduced that this plan places a high emphasis on *proactive* crisis communication activities. The main concern with the activities within this stage is that, although the media should be monitored for burning issues, interaction with the media as a consideration was not clear, which means that sustainable media relationships cannot be built. The only stakeholder task evident is to continuously update a list of all key stakeholders, which will not necessarily improve their relationship with Absa. However, the proactive identification of various communication channels, the severity levels of a crisis and the roles and responsibilities of various communication specialists might assist Absa to manage the crisis more efficiently. It is recommended that the proactive crisis communication stage should not only be a stage to identify action plans for possible crises, but that it is seen as an essential stage within the crisis communication process to build sustainable relationships with all stakeholder groups (especially the media). Communication should therefore be *practiced* in

this stage and not just *suggested*, as the relationships that are built due to proactive two-way communication create the foundation to manage a crisis sufficiently.

5.2.1.2 Interpretations on the proposed reactive crisis communication stage

As with the proactive actions identified, a core focus is placed on reactive crisis communication. As a strong emphasis is placed on stakeholder *communication* during this stage, it can be argued that this plan is built on the perspective that crisis communication is predominantly *reactive*, which highlights the importance of prompt decision making in line with the responsibilities of each communication specialist, as identified in the proactive stage. The plan rightfully highlights that the manner in which Absa reacts during a crisis has a permanent impact on their reputation, and it is also stipulated that, depending on the severity of the crisis, the Head of Media Relations should be the key spokesperson; therefore communication will be ‘out of one mouth’. In code red crises (severe crises) the CEO will be the spokesperson, which will increase the credibility of messages. As suggested, media queries have to be answered within 30 minutes, which will eliminate room for rumour mongering and speculation. Emphasis is also placed on internal communication during a crisis, as employees could distribute inaccurate information during a crisis. By keeping employees abreast of further progressions in a crisis a stronger internal organisational climate could be established and employees might feel that they play a more important role within the organisation. Stakeholder communication within this stage is definitely emphasised, although it is perceived to be predominantly *one-way*. Despite the difficulty of obtaining input from stakeholders during times of emergency, it is argued that two-way communication should be important to retain credibility and to evaluate the stakeholders’ ‘mood’ in a crisis.

5.2.1.3 Interpretations on the proposed post-evaluative crisis communication stage

The actions categorised in this stage focus on determining whether a crisis has been sufficiently resolved and what lessons could be learnt to avoid similar occurrences in the future. From the draft document, it is not clear whether information from external stakeholders should be gathered to address concerns. Although the importance of measurement is emphasised, a forum to share knowledge necessary to build a learning organisation (to instil a strategic thinking environment) is not proposed. It is also not clear whether two-way communication is applied at this level. Furthermore, this evaluation cannot only be built on internal considerations – the inputs from external stakeholders are also vital to address their concerns, provide answers to their questions and simultaneously strengthen or restore stakeholder relationships. This is not evident in the draft document.

5.2.1.4 Relevance of IC and excellence theory variables

To further measure the level of strategy, the following table highlights the relevance of the predominant IC and excellence theory variables evident within Absa’s draft crisis communication plan:

Table 5.1: The application of excellence theory and IC variables in Absa’s draft crisis plan

Element		Level of application in crisis plan
Excellence theory elements	Strategic management of programs through environmental scanning and research	This element is recognised in the plan through the identification of reputational risk sources and scanning the media to detect burning issues. A more definite focus on two-way communication with all stakeholder groups, especially the media, will further assist in identifying possible issues. Research on past crises experiences can also assist the organisation to plan for and manage future difficulties. It is highlighted in the literature that continuous feedback, generated from experience, is vital for effective crisis preparation.
	Access to senior management	Absa has executive communication representation on top management level and, depending on the severity of a crisis the CEO will also be involved. This illustrates top management’s understanding of the importance of communication (and thus also crisis communication) on strategic level. Communication excellence cannot be achieved without a common understanding between the communication department and senior management about the function of communication within the organisation.
	Two-way communication	Although communication with stakeholders is emphasised in the reactive crisis communication stage and in Absa’s communication principles, it is predominantly one-way. Two-way communication should be practiced throughout the crisis communication process, to build and preserve stakeholder relationships.
	Participative organisational culture facilitated by symmetrical internal communication	Employee communication is only suggested during the reactive crisis communication stage. It should be highlighted that in order to be able to communicate effectively to all stakeholder groups during a crisis, a participative organisational culture is necessary through continuous two-way symmetrical communication channels (which is built proactively). Participative cultures pull employees together to collectively accomplish the mission of the organisation.
	Recognition that organisation operates in a volatile environment	This element correlates with research and environmental scanning. The volatile environment brings about change and uncertainty which are also characteristics of an organisational crisis. The realisation that the media is scanned for possible burning issues and identification of risk sources displays a recognition that Absa operates in a volatile environment.
IC elements	Stakeholder relationship building	As two-way communication practices are not promoted as a relationship building tool, it can therefore not be used as a foundation to manage a crisis more effectively. However, actions promoted in the plan such as addressing media queries, could contribute towards improving and building media relationships.
	Cross functional departmental expertise	The crisis plan clearly stipulates the use of various communication managers within the Group Marketing and Communication department specifically. However, the utilisation of employees across various departments, for example compliance and human relations and so forth, is not emphasised. The plan predominantly emphasises the use of <i>communication</i> expertise during a crisis. Expertise within the organisation should be integrated, in which experiences and meaning is shared. Therefore, organisational departments should interact consistently, especially during a crisis.

Combination of internal and external communication	On reactive crisis communication level, the plan stipulates that whatever is made public internally can be distributed externally, and that employees have to stay informed. Therefore, the facts that are communicated internally are also distributed externally and messages are thus aligned, which avoids message fragmentation.
Organisational mission marketing	In order for Absa to achieve the vision <i>to be the best provider of Financial Services in South Africa and selected African markets</i> , sustainable stakeholder relationship building through two-way communication has to be a priority within Absa's crisis communication plan. This will provide Absa with a competitive advantage by placing stakeholder concerns first. An organisation's stakeholders are the lifeblood of the organisation, and therefore their concerns, especially during a crisis, have to remain a priority to retain their credibility. The focus should not only be on sending messages, but also <i>listening</i> to stakeholders. However, as stipulated earlier, this is not proposed in the existing plan, as one-way communication practices are suggested.

From the above discussion it can be argued that Absa's draft crisis communication plan is predominantly proactive and reactive, with a limited acknowledgement of post-evaluative crisis communication. Although evaluation is recognised, a forum to share knowledge necessary to build a learning organisation to instil a strategic thinking environment, as emphasised by Niemann (2005:247), is not proposed. The plan also does not categorise the above crisis communication measures in terms of proactive, reactive or post-evaluative crisis communication stages – all measures were integrated into one plan, which might cause confusion as to what should be done before, during and after a crisis. Furthermore, without this combined structure, a strategic framework is not evident.

Another concern is that stakeholder relationship building is not regarded as a priority, only the identification of various stakeholder groups and one-way dissemination of information on *reactive level*. This is contrary to the viewpoint of Ulmer et al (2007:35), highlighted in the literature review, which states that “establishing and maintaining equal relationships with groups and organisations is critical to effective crisis communication”. Although crisis communication channels in the plan are evident, it is not clear whether it would stimulate two-way communication in order to build and preserve stakeholder relationships. The media is the only stakeholder group in which two-way communication is practiced, as media queries are answered, but it seems to be only on a *reactive level*. This is contrary to the literature review which indicates that strategic partnerships have to be cultivated with the media *prior* to crisis situations to facilitate mutual trust which will increase the likelihood of favourable media reporting (Schmidt 2005:11; Dougherty 1992:62).

Furthermore, the literature review reveals that a solid foundation for sufficient reactive crisis communication is necessary, which is built through proactive two-way communication with all stakeholders to lessen the risk of a crisis emerging. Should a crisis surface, the organisation will have a lower chance of being perceived as guilty. This is contradictory to Absa's communication principles that seem to display a predominant one-way communication approach. Furthermore, as communication with stakeholders is predominantly presented reactively, it could be argued that this plan regards crisis communication as a reactive function. However, it was also deduced that crisis communication should be regarded as *the dialogue between the organisation and its public sector during and after the negative occurrence*, or as proposed in this study that a crisis communication process should have proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages. However, Absa's draft crisis communication plan lacks strategic depth in this regard, does not focus on the variables of IC and excellence theory, and can therefore not be regarded as a strategic process.

5.2.2 Interpretation of the one-on-one interview and focus group

This section firstly focuses on describing the interpretation categories used for the one-on-one interview and focus group, after which the findings obtained from the one-on-one interview and focus group will be discussed respectively.

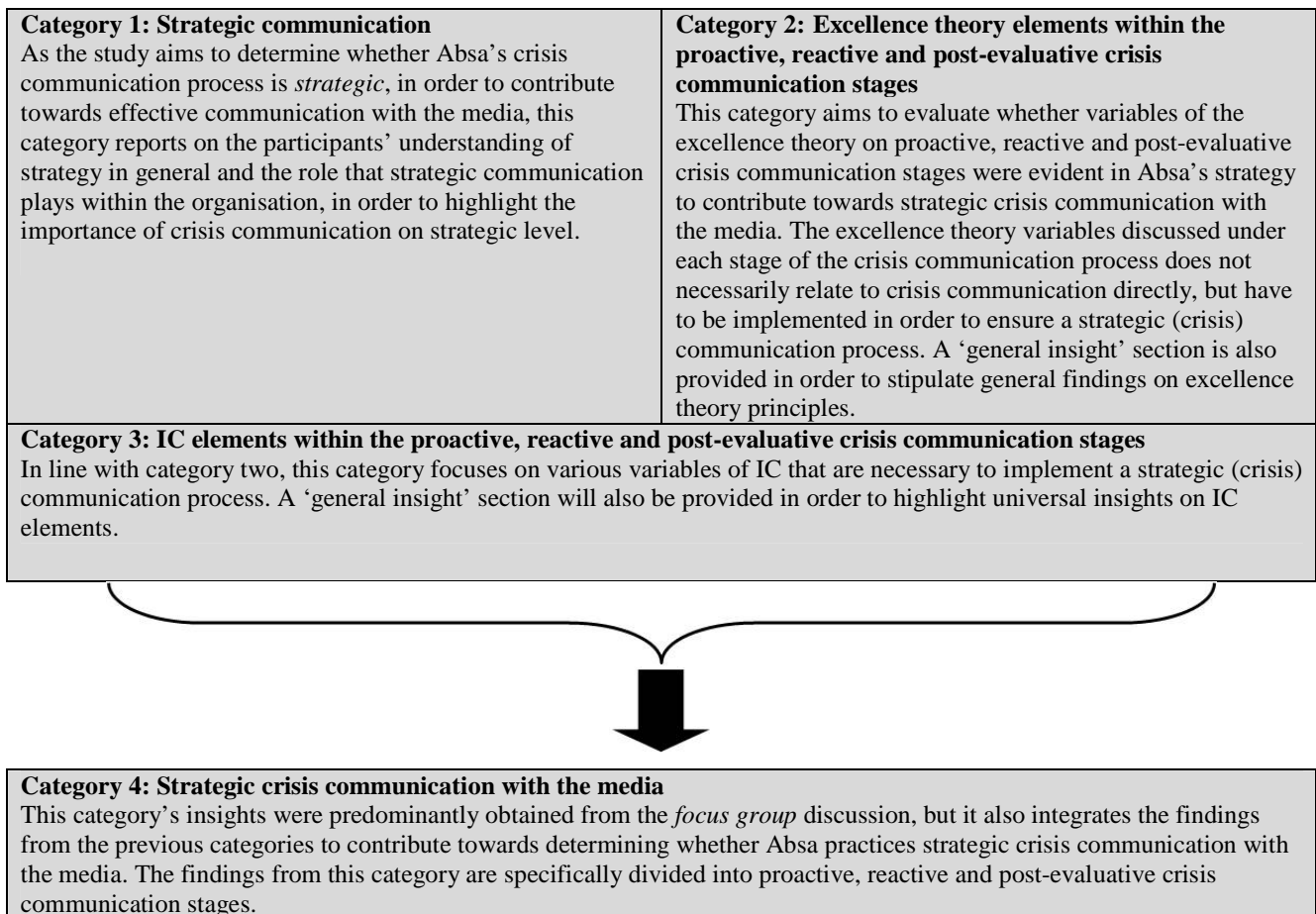
5.2.2.1 Describing the interpretation categories

The findings obtained from the one-on-one interview and focus group were divided into three main interpretation categories based on the theoretical underpinning of the study, namely strategic communication, excellence theory and IC. These categories were selected to determine whether Absa's crisis communication process is strategic, to ensure effective crisis communication with the media. As emphasised previously, the crisis communication process has to be strategic to communicate effectively with all stakeholders. However, the focus of this study is on the media specifically. Therefore, in order for Absa to communicate effectively with the media during a crisis, it is argued that the crisis communication process in general has to be strategic. Category one serves as an introduction to strategy and reports Absa's general understanding of a strategic process and strategic communication. Category two and three determines whether variables of IC and the excellence theory are proactively, reactively and post-evaluatively applied to ensure a strategic crisis communication process. The utilisation of these categories therefore contributes towards determining whether Absa has a strategic crisis communication process. A fourth category will be derived from the findings stipulated

in the above-mentioned categories to report how Absa communicates with the media before, during and after a crisis.

The data obtained from categories one to three was analysed in terms of key responses, relation to theory and subjective interpretations (corresponding with Miles and Huberman's (1994:10-12) data analysis method). For example, within the '*key responses*' sections the essence of the findings, obtained from data collection, was highlighted. The '*relation to theory*' section reviewed the important findings obtained from the literature review, relating to these interpretation categories. Lastly, a *subjective interpretation* was made from the findings, utilising the literature as foundation for the arguments. Category four was not divided into these sections. However, the findings were categorised as proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages. A brief explanation of each category is provided in the following figure:

Figure 5.1 Explanation of the interpretation categories for the one-on-one interview and focus group



An analysis of the data obtained from the one-on-one interview and focus group according to the interpretation categories one to three, within which the key responses, relating to theory and subjective sections are highlighted, is attached as Addendum F. Only the main findings related to these categories are addressed in the discussion to follow. As stipulated above, category four is not divided according to these sections and the findings on each crisis communication stage are addressed in the focus group section.

5.2.2.2 Insights obtained from the one-on-one interview

The one-on-one interview with Liezl Squier, Acting Manager: Chief Executive Communication within Absa’s Group Marketing and Corporate Affairs Department was *exploratory*, in order to obtain insights on strategy, strategic communication and stakeholder relationship building specifically. These findings

were not always related to crises specifically, but provided a general understanding on the key concepts that underline this study, which supported further findings of the study.

The main findings obtained from the one-on-one interview can be summarised as follows:

- Strategy is a roadmap to achieve organisational objectives

According to Squier (2009), strategy is the roadmap of how plans are implemented and also to ensure that the organisation has the necessary *resources* for these implementations. This is in line with the definition of strategy proposed in the literature *as a plan - some sort of consciously intended course of action, a guideline (or set of guidelines) to deal with a situation*. Furthermore, Squier (2009) stipulates that important elements of a strategic plan are conversation to sketch the bigger picture; a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis; environmental impact studies and stakeholder analyses to obtain a clear understanding of their wants and needs. These elements correlate with some of the phases of Booth's basic model for strategic management highlighted in the literature review and specifically highlight the importance of *proactive* measures. However, Squier (2009) does not mention the importance of implementation and evaluation measures within a strategic plan.

- The communication plan has to be aligned with the overall organisational strategy and requires representation on top management level in order to be strategic

Squier (2009) argues that strategic communication plans are developed by aligning the overall organisational strategy and CEOs priorities as well as a detailed evaluation of the external environment. The latter correlates with an argument posed in the literature review by Grates (1995:19) and Cabot and Steiner (2006:64) who contend that a communication strategy can only be effective once integrated with the overall business strategy. Squier (2009) further argues that Absa's communication is represented on top management level through the Executive Director of Marketing and Communication, with functional and departmental communication managers that filter important information from the top to the rest of the department. As outlined in the literature, an organisation's management needs to show a commitment and willingness to recognise communication's worth on strategic level in order to contribute towards the overall acknowledgment of communication as a strategic function.

- Communication's contribution towards the achievement of organisational strategy has to be illustrated

Squier (2009) states that communication within corporate organisations cannot fulfil a mere support function as in the past – it is vital to display communication's contribution towards the achievement of the organisational strategy. If this alignment is absent, communication will never be regarded as a fundamental building block of the organisational strategy or an important strategic function. In the literature it is highlighted that the role of communication has been neglected in the strategic management process, and is predominantly regarded as a technical role. It is subsequently argued that two-way communication is essential as a sustainable stakeholder relationship building tool, and can assist the organisation to function more effectively and achieve the mission of the organisation. Squier (2009) indicates that communicators need to display the worth of communication to top management in order to harvest the benefits of communication on strategic level. She continues by saying that Absa follows a centralised model in which hierarchal structures are broken down and communication specialists have easier access to top management to better plan for and manage a crisis (Squier 2009).

- Top management's input is essential during the compilation of crisis communication plans

In line with the above findings, Squier (2009) highlights the importance of top management's involvement in the compilation of a *crisis* communication plan specifically, by stating that it will not only assist the communication team to ensure faster implementation but also provide valuable input in the process itself. As outlined in the literature, the most important aspect for successful crisis communication is to have immediate access to authority – but even more important is for the communicator to have authority. This is achievable within Absa, as communication is already represented on top management level, as argued previously. However, the communication specialist should have the authority to make important *decisions* during a crisis. Nevertheless, this finding does indicate that crisis communication is an important element that should be considered on top management level.

- The main function of organisational communication is employee engagement

Squier (2009) stipulates that the main function of communication in the organisation is *employee engagement*, which is achieved through shifting Absa's mindset from top-down, one-way communication to two-way communication practices through various opinion surveys and other communication channels. As stipulated in the literature, for both the organisation and stakeholders to benefit, meaningful communication, facilitated through two-way communication, must be practiced. Furthermore it was argued that *effective communication is not a one-way process* but that a sound internal organisational climate should be created through dialogue in order to effectively communicate externally during times of high uncertainty, which is characteristic of an organisational crisis.

- Communicators fulfil an advisory role

Squier (2009) states that Absa's top management always appreciates input from the communication team and tends to listen to the communication specialists to resolve and manage issues. Such a structure will contribute towards empowering communication as a management function and, as a result, manage a crisis more effectively, as the importance of sufficient crisis communication will be understood and supported. Inviting input from communication practitioners to guide management decisions, correlates with the boundary spanning role of communication, as highlighted in the literature review.

- Communication practitioners are the custodians of the organisation's reputation

Squier (2009) regards Absa's communication department specifically as the *custodians of the organisation's reputation*. This finding correlates with the previous finding of the worth of communication on strategic level through contributing towards the achievement of the organisational strategy. This is achieved through communication practitioners acting as *boundary spanners* as highlighted above, which underlines communicators' ability to function on the edge of the organisation, thereby liaising between the organisation and its stakeholders. This function is vital for successful crisis management, as communicators will be able to detect and resolve stakeholder concerns during crises.

- Communication should fulfil an enabling and facilitating role

Communication within Absa fulfils an important *enabling* and *facilitating* role. Squier (2009) argues that strategy is unclear until it is unpacked through communication – as every member of the organisation has to understand the organisation’s strategy. This is in line with the argument in the literature that communication is the adhesive that binds the individual elements of an organisation, allowing interaction and understanding among key stakeholders, which is especially necessary during crisis situations in order to address stakeholder concerns and communicate the latest crisis developments accurately.

- A participative internal culture is achieved through two-way communication channels

Squier (2009) mentions that a participative internal organisational climate is created through two-way communication channels and various employee surveys as referred to above. As the results of these internal surveys are analysed, it can contribute to a stronger participative organisational culture which can assist the organisation to better manage change and uncertainty brought about by organisational crises. This correlates with the arguments posed in the literature that a participative organisational culture is inevitable for effective crisis management, as a sound internal organisational climate and understanding of the crisis will result in effective crisis communication to the outside. This is also in line with the excellence theory that holds that a participative organisational culture is achieved through two-way symmetrical internal communication which facilitates knowledge sharing and cooperation among employees.

- Research and environmental scanning is the basis for crisis communication plans

Research and environmental scanning are conducted as basis for the crisis communication plans within Absa (Squier 2009). Issue management and identification of stakeholder concerns are also used as key determinants in the development of a proactive crisis communication plan. According to Squier (2009), knowing that the organisation operates in a volatile industry places higher emphasis on environmental scanning and subsequently, proactive crisis management. Communication programs should be managed strategically; thus it should be based on *research and environmental scanning* as highlighted in Chapter 3. Conducting research and environmental scanning not only contributes towards a *strategic*

communication plan, but it also assists the organisation to avoid possible crises or to detect issues of concern.

- Openness and honesty during a crisis are vital

Within Absa, transparency and honesty during a crisis are vital, which can also contribute towards a participative culture in which knowledge is shared. However, Squier (2009) states that an open, honest relationship with internal stakeholders also has a risk, as everything that is communicated to employees could be distributed to the media. This once again correlates with the objectivity versus advocacy issue raised in the literature, in which communicators should guard against revealing too much information during a crisis, which could place the organisation under jeopardy and also revealing too little information, which could become unethical and harm the organisation's credibility.

- Only important lessons learnt from the crisis will be shared with top management

As an evaluation measure, only important lessons learnt from the crisis will be shared with top management (Squier 2009). By only sharing the lessons learnt with top management will not create a forum to share knowledge – a forum of discussion has to be created with all the necessary internal organisational stakeholders. If this knowledge sharing culture does not happen on top management level, it will be difficult to institutionalise in the rest of the organisation and with other external stakeholder groups. This correlates with the arguments that two-way communication after a crisis is important and that an organisation should make an effort to listen to stakeholder concerns and answer their questions. This will assist Absa to rebuild a tarnished reputation and/or strengthen their credibility.

- An integrated stakeholder approach is key

Absa aims to instil an enhanced integrated stakeholder approach, moving away from inconsistent stakeholder engagement; *an increased emphasis on stakeholders is thus evident*. Squier (2009) maintains that the modern consumer is much more educated than in the past – therefore is it vital to fully understand what the stakeholders' wants and needs are (especially in an industry that is sensitive, such as the financial industry). An IC department can result in a more strategic communication function

in order to establish sustainability and good corporate citizenship, which is vital for stakeholder relationships (Squier 2009). Furthermore, IC will ensure message consistency (Squier 2009). These findings emphasise the core of this study – the argument for the institutionalisation of an integrated crisis communication framework, because IC is a strategic process focused on communicating *with* stakeholders, not communicating *to* them. This highlights the importance of two-way communication and enabling the organisation to address and resolve stakeholder concerns during a crisis, as argued in the literature review.

- Internal and external messages should be aligned

Squier (2009) says that Absa follows an IC structure to ensure that internal and external messages are aligned. This finding underlines the key characteristic of IC, highlighting that internal and external messages should be harmonised to avoid fragmented communication that can have a negative impact on the organisation's image. This is especially necessary during times of crises, as the credibility of the organisation will already be under suspicion. Thus, by ensuring message consistency, it could contribute towards maintaining a credible perception or lower the chance of reputational damage to Absa.

- Sustainable media relationships are vital during a crisis

Proactive media relationships are vital to ensure the media's support when things go wrong. According to Squier (2009), *sustainable relationships* with the media are built through 'media roundtables' and forums in which the media has the opportunity to ask questions on finance-related aspects. It is argued that the media appreciates this proactive communication. Relationships between the various business units within Absa are also established with the media through this proactive, personal media contact. Potential problems that could result in crises are proactively addressed in these meetings. Casual meetings are also arranged between the CEO and the media to get to know each other on a personal level. It is evident that Absa places emphasis on proactive media relationships through discussion forums to identify issues of concern. These relationships are also built on top management level in a humanistic manner which could also assist Absa during times of crises (Squier 2009).

As argued in the literature, sustainable media relationships should be cultivated to ensure more accurate reporting during crises, as the media is the former of public opinion. Furthermore, it is indicated that the aim of crisis communication with the media is to gain the public's trust through the media, thereby cultivating a *win-win partnership*. Absa relies on the media to communicate accurately to the public, and in turn, the media receives newsworthy stories.

- Two-way communication could eliminate or lessen rumours during crises

Squier (2009) states that two-way communication plays an important role in eliminating or suppressing rumours during a crisis. If stakeholders constantly receive updated information, rumours can be effectively managed or even eliminated. As outlined in the literature, besides two-way communication being a sustainable stakeholder relationship building tool, it could be utilised to manage conflict effectively, which is essential during crises. This can be achieved further within Absa through creating a feedback forum in crisis situations, thereby not just communicating the various updates of the crisis, but also listening to stakeholder concerns.

- Involve the person that is an expert on the particular crisis

Squier (2009) also mentions that during the event of a crisis, it is vital to involve the person that is an expert on the particular crisis. For example, should the crisis be related to a specific fund, the relevant fund manager should work closely with the communication team to manage the crisis successfully. The communication team also has to work closely with this expert and continuously update the manager with facts. Squire (2009) also indicates that Absa always has a legal representative on the crisis team. This finding highlights the utilisation of cross-departmental expertise, which is an important driver of IC. As stipulated in the literature, expertise within the organisation should be integrated by departments sharing their different experiences and interpretations of a situation. Through obtaining diverse departmental expertise within a crisis, the crisis could be resolved more effectively.

The insights obtained from the one-on-one interview indicates that communication on management level is supported within Absa, and more importantly, top management's input is obtained within the formulation of crisis communication plans. It is therefore argued that top management in Absa regards crisis communication as an essential function, that two-way communication with the media and other

stakeholders during crises is important and that a participative internal organisational climate is essential. However, the utilisation of two-way communication seems to be a matter of course and the consideration thereof as a sustainable relationship-building tool seems to be absent in Absa. Furthermore, the findings indicate that Absa does implement some of the excellence theory and IC variables such as the combination of internal and external communication. It could therefore be argued that an integrated crisis communication framework will complement Absa's current communication structure and further improve current crisis communication practices.

Based on the findings of the one-on-one interview, the following insights were obtained from the focus group, which correlate with and/or contradict the above findings.

5.2.2.3 Insights obtained from the focus group

The focus group interview, conducted with seven senior managers within Absa's Group Marketing and Corporate Affairs department, specifically focused on obtaining insights on *strategic crisis communication with the media*. Therefore, the findings of category four, divided into proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages, are highlighted in this section. Prior to providing these insights, the participants' understanding on the other key concepts of the study (strategy, strategic communication, IC and the excellence theory elements) were also obtained. The main findings relating to the latter concepts are reported below as an introduction, to determine whether their perceptions were similar to the perceptions obtained in the one-on-one interview and literature review. The main findings obtained from the focus group are as follows:

- Strategy is 'opportunity divided by capacity'

Strategy was defined by the participants as *opportunity divided by capacity* – it is about utilising opportunities in the market that will maximise your return through the available resources. This definition correlates with the definition of 'strategic planning' in the literature, in which it is stated that strategic planning is a wide-ranging process, to ensure *long-term organisational survival* and it focuses on the actions necessary to improve organisational performance. Furthermore, the participants stated that strategy is a multilateral, dynamic process of determining where the organisation is today and where it wants to be in future. This correlates with Squier's (2009) definition of strategy being a roadmap to achieve organisational objectives.

- *Strategic* communication is structured communication that influences business strategy

The participants stated that strategic communication is *structured* communication that aims to achieve specific objectives. Furthermore, it was argued that strategic communication is the ability to *influence* business strategy and not just *mirror* business strategy. The participants indicated that communication can be used to identify risks and influence certain business decisions; it moves communication from a *technical* to a *strategic function*. This correlates with Squier's (2009) statement that communication fulfils an *advisory role*. The participants also said that the most important element that communication contributes on strategic level is to keep the business honest through *boundary spanning – communication practitioners assist management to detect what the outcome of their business decisions will be*. This is supported in the literature review where it is argued that the boundary spanning and mirror and window functions are all vital functions that contribute towards strategic communication. Thus, strategic communication within Absa is not just regarded as mirroring the business strategy, but also as having the ability to *influence* business decisions. As stipulated by Squier (2009), communication has to display its worth on a strategic level, which is achieved by communication specialists *advising* top management on the outcomes of their business decisions as highlighted by the focus group participants. This is a key consideration in terms of crisis communication, as crisis communication specialists can assist top management to make the right decisions to avoid possible crises altogether or to efficiently manage and resolve crises. This advisory quality of communication specialists is based on sustainable stakeholder relationship building through two-way communication and continuously scanning the business environment.

Furthermore, the participants stated that the communication strategy also emphasises the importance of measuring Absa's success through various tools, for example, the Absa Group Reputation Index, Group Communication Scorecard and other communication effectiveness measurement tools. As stipulated in the literature, a communication strategy emphasises stakeholders' perceptions of the organisation and how these perceptions will be amended, reinforced or neutralised – it provides a framework against which continuing corporate communication decisions are measured.

- The involvement of top management will depend on the severity of a crisis

From a crisis perspective, the participants argued that the involvement of top management will depend on the severity of a crisis (as illustrated by the various levels of a crisis in the crisis plan), whereas Squier (2009) highlighted that communication is a key organisational function which is well presented on top management level. Thus, according to Squier (2009), top management will by default be involved throughout a crisis, as the communication function (including crisis communication) is considered as a management function. In the literature it is indicated that communication should be viewed as a management function and be involved in managing change and uncertainty during a crisis. Top management should therefore not just be involved in case of a severe crisis as indicated by the focus group.

- Two-way communication with the media is important, but not always possible

In terms of the *excellence theory* elements, it was stipulated by the participants that two-way communication with the media is important, but not always possible, due to the diversity of stakeholders that Absa needs to report to. It was also mentioned that some information cannot be communicated due to confidentiality issues. However, the participants also stated that one-way communication during a crisis could have severe reputational consequences. As argued previously, communicators must have a balance between objectivity and advocacy and the media relationship building established through two-way communication *prior* to a crisis situation will facilitate mutual trust, which will increase the likelihood of favourable media reporting.

- An organic organisational structure would not assist the organisation to better manage a crisis

The participants felt that an organic organisational structure is ideal, but it would not assist the organisation to better manage a crisis. It was argued that when planning for a crisis, organisational structures are not a consideration. As highlighted in the literature review, the traditional mechanistic view of the organisation should be replaced with a less bureaucratic, organic structure, in which employees have easy access to top management, who in turn welcomes input from staff. Crisis communicators require easy access to top management in order to ensure successful crisis

management. An organic organisational structure is also necessary to create a participative internal organisational climate as discussed previously.

- All elements of the excellence theory and IC are not viable on every crisis communication stage

A core insight obtained from the focus group was that all elements of the excellence theory and IC are not viable within every stage of a crisis – for example, conducting research will only be viable on a proactive and post-evaluative level – it does not make sense to *conduct* research on a reactive level. The research conducted on proactive and post-evaluative levels within Absa will only assist the organisation to better manage a crisis.

- Successful implementation of IC depends on the employees

The participants argued that an IC department will only ensure more organised practices and not necessarily a strategic environment. They argued that the success of an IC department depends on the *employees* – there has to be a willingness to work together. This is in line with the arguments posed in the literature review that organisational stakeholders are all interdependent; changes in one stakeholder group tend to have a domino effect on other stakeholder groups; IC is constructed around this interdependency through coordinating the entire network of stakeholders' communication activities. Furthermore, internal stakeholders should be included in management decision making, which will give Absa an opportunity to interact and, in so doing, enhance collaboration among employees.

- Internal and external communication message alignment in a crisis is essential

Correlating with Squier's (2009) standpoint that internal and external messages should be aligned, the participants agreed that internal communication plans have to be aligned with external communication plans (within a crisis context specifically), as it will assist communication practitioners to better manage a crisis. This links with the arguments on IC that message fragmentation can be avoided through the integration of internal and external communication, which is vital for effective crisis communication.

As the focus group discussion primarily focused on measuring strategic crisis communication with the media, the predominant findings relating to proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages with the media, collectively representing interpretation category four, are outlined below:

- Interpretation category four: Strategic crisis communication with the media

The focus group participants highlighted that crisis communication is not regarded as an element of crisis management; it is rather seen as an *independent* process. The participants' viewpoint of crisis communication as an independent process therefore also implies that crisis communication in Absa is not an element that should encapsulate the whole crisis management process (which includes proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis management stages). The reciprocal relationship between crisis communication and crisis management, as argued in the literature chapters, is also not supported.

a) Proactive crisis communication findings

The results from the research indicate that Absa does not necessarily practice proactive crisis communication. The actions employed prior to a crisis are regarded by the focus group as *issues management*. This supports the argument in the literature that issues management is an important element of the crisis management process, and can assist the organisation to identify issues that may have an impact on the organisation's well-being. It was also indicated that communicators, who act as boundary spanners, must identify problems of concern. This is achieved through continuous two-way communication with all stakeholders, therefore highlighting the need for *two-way communication* in identifying issues of concern. Furthermore, the participants indicated that Absa's agenda will never be to manage a crisis; it will always be to position the organisation more effectively. However, the focus group did acknowledge that it is vital for communicators to act as boundary spanners and liaisons between the organisation and its stakeholders to proactively identify crises.

The participants indicated that two-way communication within Absa is proactively used to *educate* the media through media roundtable discussions, always answering questions and providing comments. However, they regard two-way communication as a matter of course and its worth as a *stakeholder relationship building tool* is not specifically considered. Emphasis was also placed on 'treating' the

media with year-end functions, tours, lunches etcetera. This is contrary to having constructive conversations that contribute towards relationship building with the media, which is in line with the argument that a *spirit of cooperation* must be established with the media.

In addition to the above, the participants stated that media relationships established prior to a crisis could result in constructive or destructive reporting during a crisis – *what will be reported is a matter of media and organisational ethics; it depends on the individual journalist and the respective publication*. This is contradictory to the argument in the literature review that media relationships will definitely assist the organisation to better manage a crisis, and that it provides a sense of control over what will be reported.

b) Reactive crisis communication findings

The participants regarded crisis communication mainly as a reactive process, despite having a draft crisis communication plan that has proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis stages. There was also the viewpoint that when reacting to a crisis, there are proactive, reactive and post-evaluative actions to take: once a crisis happens, you are proactive by ensuring that you are on top of matters and everything is under control. Communicating and sending updates are regarded as the reactive action, and determining how information is being received is regarded as evaluation during the reactive stage. Although the viewpoint of crisis communication as a reactive function dominated, the participants' viewpoints are not supported by the literature review and focus of this study, which maintains that crisis communication should be part of every organisation's business and strategic plans to establish and maintain equal stakeholder relationships (in this case the media).

Other reactive crisis communication actions highlighted by the participants are that, in a crisis, it is vital to obtain the facts prior to responding to media queries. This is in line with the literature review, which highlights that a perception of unreliability will be instilled when unconfirmed or incorrect information is disseminated as fact. Queries are managed reactively in accordance to Absa, not proactively. However, as argued previously, communicators should act as boundary spanners to ensure that stakeholder queries are identified and addressed, as other crises could often be avoided by this proactive approach.

The participants further stated that, due to the diverse nature of crises (for example, a leadership crisis or business crisis) each crisis is managed differently, which highlights the reason Absa's crises are predominantly viewed and managed reactively. According to the participants, the crisis centre is only utilised for physical crises such as a bomb scare. It seems that, within Absa, the actual crisis team is formed when a crisis occurs, although each employee's responsibility during a crisis is stipulated in the crisis plan. This contradicts the arguments posed in the literature review that a crisis team should be proactively identified and specific actions allocated according to different scenarios.

The participants argued that two-way communication within Absa is reactively used to influence and inform the media, but emphasised that they realised it is vital to create buy-in from the media in Absa's side of the story. However, as argued previously, two-way communication should already be utilised during the proactive crisis communication stage to build media relationships, not only be introduced reactively.

c) Post-evaluative crisis communication findings

The participants indicated that evaluation after a crisis is conducted, as it is argued that there are always lessons to be learnt. This action however is not defined as 'post-evaluative crisis communication' by the participants – in Absa they regard this as 'normal' evaluation. According to the participants, the most important post crisis action for Absa is to evaluate whether the crisis team members managed the crisis well and coped well under pressure. It was also stated that the 'lessons learnt' are usually only communicated to top management. As stated in the literature review, ideally, a forum should be established to create a strategic thinking environment through *knowledge sharing*. Absa's crisis communication plan also stipulates that an 'after crisis evaluation report' has to be compiled and distributed to the relevant parties. This, however, also eliminates discussion and knowledge sharing about the lessons learnt, and how the incident could assist the organisation to instil better proactive crisis communication practices.

The participants indicated that post-evaluative two-way crisis communication with the media is not practiced by Absa. However, they argued that by communicating with the media after a crisis to assure the public that the particular crisis has been resolved, as well as stipulating the measures that will be implemented to avoid similar occurrences in future, could increase the credibility of an organisation

and contribute towards the trust relationship with all stakeholders. In the literature review, it is stipulated that after the crisis, the interaction with the media during the crisis has to be evaluated, to determine which strategies were effective and which were not. Publicity surrounding the crisis should also be carefully evaluated to determine whether the reporting was favourable towards the organisation.

A summary of the key insights obtained from the three data collection methods, including the draft crisis communication plan, one-on-one interview and focus group discussions are summarised in the following section, to form the basis of and motivation for the proposed integrated crisis communication framework for strategic crisis communication with the media.

5.3 KEY INSIGHTS OF THE FINDINGS

This section firstly focuses on highlighting general insights obtained, relating to the research topic. Following this, the key insights obtained from data collection are summarised according to key paradigms of this study, which include strategic communication; the crisis communication process with reference to the proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages; crisis communication with the media (focusing on stakeholder relationship building through two-way communication); excellence theory variables and IC variables.

5.3.1 General insights

It was evident during data collection, supported by the literature review, that the financial industry operates in a more sensitive environment in comparison to other industries, as financial institutions manage their clients' money. Clark et al (2004:294) echoed by Squier (2009) argue that the modern consumer is also more educated and the media is always nearby to report on organisational negligence, which leaves little room for mistakes. This, inter alia, highlights the necessity of sufficient crisis communication processes within a financial environment.

5.3.2 Strategic communication

As argued in the literature, the proposed proactive, reactive and post evaluative crisis communication stages represent the planning, implementation and evaluation actions of a *strategic management process*. The participants never stated that strategy has anything to do with planning, implementation and evaluation. To them, it is a matter of *utilising resources optimally in order to maximise return*. Furthermore, strategic crisis communication was regarded as a necessity to implement strategy, as

communication strategists will be able to give advice on the outcomes of business decisions, as opposed to merely implementing top management decisions and serving a technical function. The boundary spanning role, as highlighted in the literature, is thus evident. Therefore, by having strategic crisis communicators to communicate answers initiated by themselves to the media, will ensure consistent and accurate responses. Also, as communicators work closely with stakeholders during a crisis, their insights will be key determinants on various business decisions during a crisis. They could therefore advise top management of the necessary actions to be taken during a crisis. Based on this argument the focus should thus be less on the various levels necessary to implement a strategic crisis communication plan, and more on the strategic advisory role that (crisis) communicators play on each level. However, it is still argued that proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages are necessary for a strategic crisis communication process.

5.3.3 The crisis communication process

Although the crisis communication actions in Absa's draft crisis communication plan could be categorised as in keeping with the proposed stages (although not presented as such), the participants regarded crisis communication as an independent process and not a key element of the crisis management process. Therefore, the viewpoint that there is a reciprocal relationship between crisis communication and crisis management, as argued previously, was not supported. Furthermore, crisis communication is mainly regarded as a *reactive* function. It was argued that planning and avoiding crises will never be the organisational agenda; the focus will always be on *positioning* Absa in the best possible manner. The actions that form part of proactive crisis communication, as argued by the researcher in the literature chapters, were regarded as elements that form part of either reputation management or issues management. These actions include, among others, risk communication, stakeholder relationship building and media liaison in order to create cooperation and openness with stakeholders prior to a crisis. Additionally, there seems to be a contradiction in what the communication practitioners believe and what is stipulated in the crisis communication plan (as the plan does present an integrated structure). This could either be ascribed to the fact that the plan has not yet been formally implemented, or because the plan was developed by an external crisis communication specialist that possibly had a different outlook (in comparison to the communication managers) on the ideal crisis communication plan for Absa. Based on this argument, proactive crisis communication needs to be rephrased to better define the two-way communication actions that have to be implemented prior to a crisis to ensure sufficient crisis management. This is because the actions

encapsulated by this phrase will not only be implemented for crisis communication specifically, but also upon the implementation of IC within the organisation for sustainable stakeholder relationship building in general.

In the conversations with the various participants less emphasis was placed on post-evaluative crisis communication as opposed to reactive and proactive crisis measures. Insights are only *shared* with top management and a forum to share knowledge and to restore relationships is absent. Although limited, the draft crisis communication plan proposed follow-up measures to a greater extent.

5.3.4 Crisis communication with the media

The participants stated that obtaining all the facts and having a single spokesperson are the most important elements of successful crisis communication with the media. The most important element of successful crisis communication with the media, for the purpose of this study, is two-way communication to build sustainable media relationships. The participants regarded two-way communication as a matter of course and the value of two-way communication as a *stakeholder relationship building tool* was not considered. Despite the latter, Absa has valuable two-way communication tools that are utilised to build relationships between the various business units and the media, such as media roundtables and forums. Furthermore, it was also argued that, although sustainable media relationships are essential to ensure sufficient crisis communication, it depends on the ethics and integrity of the journalist and publication to determine what will be reported on in a crisis.

In the literature review it was argued that two-way crisis communication with the media is the preferred approach, but that it is not always possible, due to the confidentiality of information, as the media is not the only stakeholder to consider during a crisis. Thus, to decrease the risk of false reporting, the organisation's spokesperson should always be available for comments and provide information on the latest developments of the crisis. It is also essential to communicate with journalists after a crisis to stipulate what will be done to avoid similar occurrences. The reality is that one cannot always control what will be reported in a crisis, despite following this relationship building recipe. Absa argued that the core focus in a crisis should not be on two-way communication with all stakeholders but rather on how to resolve the crisis. However, the value of two-way communication with stakeholders already starts on proactive crisis communication level.

5.3.5 IC variables

Variables of IC that are regarded as a necessity for crisis communication are organisational mission marketing, a combination of internal and external communication and the utilisation of cross functional departmental expertise. An organic organisational structure to generate a participative internal climate and purposeful interactivity is regarded as ideal, but not essential for crisis communication. Some participants did state that an IC department will contribute towards strategic communication practices, and others felt that it will only ensure more structured communication messages during a crisis. The success of IC according to Absa depends upon the employees' willingness to work together. Two-way communication, which is a key variable of the excellence theory, was not consciously utilised to build sustainable stakeholder relationships (which is an IC element), it was regarded as a matter of course.

5.3.6 Excellence theory variables

With regards to excellence theory variables, Absa supports the viewpoint of conducting research proactively and post-evaluatively to a crisis. However, the participants stated that this research (conducted proactively) will not necessarily assist the organisation to manage (reactive) a crisis more effectively. Evaluation afterwards could assist the organisation to make the necessary adjustments to the crisis plan in order to ensure more sufficient crisis communication in future. A further variable of the excellence theory that was supported is access to top management. Some participants argued that in order to make a crisis communication plan strategic it has to be elevated to top management level. However, the predominant viewpoint was that communication should be practiced strategically through communication practitioners that give top management advice on the outcomes of their business decisions. Furthermore, it was also discovered that all the variables of the excellence theory and IC do not have equal merit on each stage of a crisis as stipulated in the one-on-one questionnaire (attached as Addendum C). Consequently, it is evident that an excellence and IC mindset has to be instilled within the communication department, and supported by the organisation as a whole in order to facilitate strategic and efficient crisis communication. By institutionalising IC principles within the communication department, the elements necessary to ensure a strategic crisis communication process will, by design, be evident.

In summary, to answer the research sub-problem of determining whether Absa's crisis communication plan can be proactively, reactively and post-evaluatively applied and categorised as part of the crisis management process in order to contribute towards strategic crisis communication with the media, the

following insights have been obtained: Firstly, Absa does not regard crisis communication as a function that encapsulates the crisis management process. It is instead regarded as a reactive function upon the occurrence of a crisis. However, there are important preparation and evaluation actions that have to be implemented to ensure sufficient crisis communication reactively, but these actions were regarded as part of risk management or issues management. Secondly, as argued in the beginning of this chapter, the variables of IC and the excellence theory have to be evident to ensure a strategic crisis communication plan, in conjunction with a process that has proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages.

From the above findings, four key insights underline the integrated crisis communication framework which is proposed in the following chapter:

- a) A strategic crisis communication plan should have proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages. This argument is solely based on arguments posed in the literature, as it was not supported by the participants.
- b) In conjunction with the above structure, the advisory role of crisis communication should be emphasised on each stage of crisis communication to contribute towards practicing crisis communication strategically.
- c) Proactive crisis communication should be rephrased to *integrated crisis communication* to highlight that, upon the implementation of IC principles, proactive crisis communication measures will by default be evident. Integrated crisis communication also highlights the importance of two-way communication as a foundation for a strategic crisis communication process, which filters through reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication.
- d) Excellence theory variables need to be practiced alongside IC variables, as it became evident that these concepts overlap. IC and excellence theory variables complement one another – the one cannot be practiced without the other

5.4 SUMMARY

This chapter focused on reporting the findings obtained from the three qualitative data collection methods, namely the draft crisis communication document, the one-on-one interview and the focus group. The objective of this data collection was to determine whether Absa's crisis communication with the media is strategic. The existence of a crisis communication process with proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages and the application of IC and excellence theory variables were used as key determinants to establish whether Absa's crisis process is strategic.

The main findings relating to the strategic communication, IC and excellence theory variables and strategic crisis communication with the media, which represents the four interpretation categories, were provided. Within each category the key findings relating to theory and subjective interpretations were highlighted.

Four key insights obtained from the data collection is the core focus for the proposition of an integrated crisis communication framework for the media in the following chapter: Firstly, a crisis communication process with proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages is necessary to instil a strategic framework. Secondly, to further emphasise strategic crisis communication, the advisory function of communication on each of these proposed stages has to be practiced. A third finding, which is a revolutionary concept, is the proposition that *integrated crisis communication (ICC)* should be practiced, which replaces proactive crisis communication. Lastly, it became evident that excellence theory and IC variables supplement one another and should thus be practiced interchangeably.

CHAPTER 6: AN INTEGRATED CRISIS COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGIC CRISIS COMMUNICATION WITH THE MEDIA

The crisis communicator should specifically develop “a spirit of cooperation with the media” (Fearn-Banks 2007:25).

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focuses on highlighting the findings obtained from the one-on-one interview and focus group, which are supplemented by an analysis of Absa’s draft crisis communication plan. The findings are related to the four interpretation categories, namely strategic communication, excellence theory, IC and strategic crisis communication with the media. The main findings obtained from the previous chapter are elaborated on in this chapter to form the basis for the proposition of an integrated crisis communication framework.

Although this chapter proposes an *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) framework for strategic crisis communication with the media specifically, it is important to note that it could be employed as basis for strategic crisis communication with *any stakeholder group*. Hence, it is argued that an organisation’s crisis communication has to be strategic in general in order to effectively communicate with all stakeholder groups, not just the media, as is the focus of this study.

This chapter addresses the following sub-problem and research question:

Sub-problem	Research question
Sub-problem 4: To address the need for an integrated crisis communication framework in order to contribute towards strategic crisis communication with the media.	Research question 5: Can IC be applied in order to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media?

The discussion focuses on how the application of *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) allows the implementation of a crisis communication process with proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages, the practice of the advisory role of crisis communication and the integration of excellence and IC variables. This discussion will thus not only address the four key findings outlined in the previous chapter, but also emphasise the need for a strategic crisis communication process, facilitated by an IC approach.

This chapter firstly displays the relation of the four key findings to IC literature, as IC is applied in this study to facilitate a *strategic* crisis communication process. Secondly, the concept of *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) is defined, after which it is indicated, as argued above, why *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) is necessary to facilitate a crisis communication process with proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages, to implement the advisory role of crisis communication and to practice IC and excellence theory variables interchangeably.

6.2 THE RELATION OF THE FINDINGS TO IC

In the following table, the relevance of each of the four findings in terms of IC will be highlighted, as the focus of the research is to address the lack of *strategic* crisis communication processes through an *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) framework. The four key findings as outlined in the previous chapter are: the proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages of a strategic crisis communication process; the advisory role of crisis communication that should be practiced on each stage; proactive crisis communication should be rephrased to *integrated crisis communication* (ICC); and excellence theory variables need to be practiced alongside IC variables and vice versa.

Table 6.1: The relation of the key findings to IC literature

Key finding	Relation to IC
A strategic crisis communication plan should have proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages	<p>IC proposes the following actions that are applicable to the three crisis communication stages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Proactive crisis communication stage</i>: IC proposes stakeholder centricity, thereby communicating <i>with</i> stakeholders not <i>to</i> them, which emphasises the importance of two-way communication. It is argued that two-way communication should be utilised to build sustainable media relationships proactively to enable more favourable media reporting during a crisis. • <i>Reactive crisis communication stage</i>: Besides IC utilising two-way communication that could be utilised to address and manage stakeholder concerns during a crisis, it also proposes the integration of internal and external messages. Thus, during a crisis internal and external message alignment will ensure message consistency and more accurate reporting, enhancing the credibility of the organisation. • <i>Post-evaluative crisis communication stage</i>: As IC holds that learning organisation principles continuously reposition the organisation, it places emphasis on the importance of post crisis evaluation – thereby learning from particular crises to avoid similar occurrences in future.
The advisory role of crisis communication should be practiced on each stage of the crisis communication process.	IC holds the idea of the <i>renaissance communicator</i> which is based on the notion that, due to constant environmental changes, there is a need for a different approach to communication in order to instil strategic organisational communication management.
Proactive crisis communication should be rephrased as <i>integrated crisis communication</i> (ICC)	This finding is the driver of the whole framework, as it is argued that upon the implementation of <i>integrated crisis communication</i> (ICC), proactive crisis communication measures will by design be evident. However, these actions will not only be practiced for crisis situations only, as it will be evident upon the implementation of IC in general.
Practicing IC variables alongside excellence theory variables	To illustrate this finding, the following example is applicable: IC has a strong emphasis on stakeholder relationship building which is achieved through two-way communication, and is regarded as an excellence theory variable for the purpose of this study.

Against this background, the concept of *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) is defined and discussed, after which the implementation of the other three findings are addressed. Collectively, these findings form the building blocks for an *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) framework for strategic crisis communication with the media.

6.3 THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF AN INTEGRATED CRISIS COMMUNICATION (ICC) FRAMEWORK

This section firstly defines ‘framework’ in the context it is used for the purpose of this study, followed by a discussion on the various building blocks of this framework. The latter will be addressed through firstly highlighting the significance of a crisis communication process with proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages; secondly, the overlap between IC and excellence theory variables will be discussed

to highlight that IC variables need to be practiced alongside excellence theory variables, after which the advisory role of crisis communication will be addressed. Lastly, the concept of integrated crisis communication (ICC) will be elaborated on.

6.3.1 Framework defined

For the purpose of this study, a *framework* will refer to the ‘shell’ or the outline necessary to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media. Barros (2007:48) developed a definition for an information technology related framework focusing on software development, but it encapsulates the significance of a framework that is applicable to this study: A framework is “a body of code that implements the aspects that are common across an entire domain, and exposes as extension points to those elements of the domain that vary between one application and another” (Barros 2007:48). A framework, for the purpose of this study, is therefore the ‘body of code’ or foundation with various ‘extension points’ that will serve as a guideline necessary to communicate strategically with the media before, during and after a crisis.

An *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) framework is built on the argument posed in the literature that by applying IC it will contribute towards a strategic communication process during a crisis. This argument is based on the definition of IC which highlights building sustainable stakeholder relationships for a strategic communication process.

6.3.2 A crisis communication process with proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages

As argued in the literature, a *reciprocal relationship* between crisis communication and crisis management exists. Although it is indicated that crisis communication is predominantly regarded as a reactive element in both the literature and practice, it is argued that crisis communication should be a key determinant of a strategic crisis management process and consists of proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages. It is also argued that these stages of the crisis management process correlates with strategic theorists such as Booth (1993:62), who argues that a strategic management process is characterised by planning, implementation and evaluation stages. Consequently, it is argued that a strategic crisis management process should have proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages to provide a foundation for a strategic focus. Furthermore, it is argued that crisis communication does not only occur reactively, but encapsulate and connect all these stages of the crisis management process.

The above argument indicates that the first requirement for an *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) framework for strategic crisis communication with the media is that the process has proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages. However, what is practiced within each stage and how it is practiced will also be a key determinant of a strategic communication process.

6.3.3 Practicing IC variables alongside excellence theory variables

As argued in the literature, to instil a *comprehensive* strategic crisis communication process, IC and excellence theory elements need to be applied in conjunction with the above strategic communication process. From the data collection, it became clear that the elements of IC and excellence theory are not all relevant on every stage of the crisis communication process and that some variables complement one another and/or overlap. The following section focuses on displaying the various overlaps between IC and excellence theory variables to substantiate the argument that IC variables need to be practiced alongside excellence theory variables and *vice versa*.

6.3.3.1 The overlap illustration

The overlap illustration correlates with Gronstedt's (2000:15-18) three-dimensional model for IC outlined in the literature study. It was indicated that IC needs to take place throughout the organisation (external integration), ranks (vertical integration) and functions (horizontal integration). Similarly, it was argued that there is a *horizontal overlap* between excellence theory and IC elements. It also became evident that overlaps exist within IC elements and within excellence theory elements respectively; some characteristics are derivatives of others. The latter will refer to the *vertical overlap* thus illustrating the overlap among the elements of IC or excellence theory *within itself*.

The following table lists the most predominant variables of IC and excellence theory as identified in the literature and utilised in the one-on-one interview and focus group questionnaires to display the overlap between the elements:

Table 6.2: Listing and numbering of excellence and IC variables

Excellence theory variables	IC variables
1. Strategic management of crisis communication programme through communication research and environmental scanning	a. Sustainable stakeholder relationship building
2. Access to senior management	b. Stakeholder focused
3. Two-way symmetrical communication	c. Purposeful interactivity
4. Participative organisational culture	d. Organisational mission marketing
5. Symmetrical internal communication	e. Cross-functional departmental expertise integration
6. Organic organisational structure	f. Combination of internal and external communication
7. Recognition that organisation operates in a volatile environment	

The following discussions firstly illustrate the *vertical* overlap and secondly the *horizontal* overlap among the elements of IC and excellence theory variables. The main overlaps will be highlighted to illustrate the interconnectedness between the main variables and to emphasise the need for integration between these variables. Other overlaps not discussed below could also be identified in theory and practice.

The vertical overlap

Table 6.3: Vertical overlap between excellence theory and IC variables

Vertical overlap	
Excellence theory variables	IC variables
3,4,5 and 6	a, b and c
1 and 7	d and f
2 and 6	c and e
3, 4 and 6	

The first prominent vertical overlap within the excellence theory elements is between two-way symmetrical communication, participative organisational culture and symmetrical internal communication. As stipulated in the literature, two-way communication forms the essence of these variables as it is necessary to instil a participative culture in order to collectively achieve the mission of the organisation; and secondly, two-way communication will introduce a symmetrical internal organisational climate through knowledge sharing and cooperation among employees. A sound internal organisational climate is vital in order for the organisation to communicate effectively with the media during a crisis.

The second overlap exists between the strategic management of a crisis communication programme through research and environmental scanning and the recognition that the organisation operates in a volatile environment. As indicated in the literature, the acknowledgement that the volatile environment brings about change and uncertainty could place a higher emphasis on conducting research, communicating with the media and environmental scanning to detect burning issues that could result in crises.

The third excellence theory overlap is between the organic organisational structure and access to senior management. An organic organisational structure will ensure easy access for communicators to top management to ensure buy-in and acceptance of crisis communication plans. With such a structure, top management will also be more accessible for media comments in severe crises which will generate more credibility for the organisation.

The last excellence theory overlap is between a participative organisational culture, an organic organisational structure and two-way communication. As indicated, an organic organisational structure will create the necessary environment to utilise two-way communication and build a culture of participation among employees as within an organic organisation. Employees thus have easy access to top management, who welcomes input from staff.

From the above discussion, is it evident that organisations have to instil an organic organisational structure to allow the practice of two-way communication. Crisis communicators will be recognised on management level for their advisory role to top management on the outcome of business decisions. Working closely with the media, crisis experts can measure the 'mood' of journalists and act accordingly.

The first IC vertical overlap is among the elements of sustainable stakeholder relationship building, stakeholder focus and purposeful interactivity. It is highlighted in the literature review that organisational stakeholders are all interdependent; changes in one stakeholder group tend to have a domino effect on other stakeholder groups. IC is constructed around this interdependency through coordinating the entire network of stakeholders' communication activities. The second IC vertical overlap is among organisational mission marketing and the combination of internal and external messages. It is argued that by having crisis communication objectives aligned with the communication

strategy that is focused on achieving the overall organisational mission, internal and external messages have to be aligned to ensure message consistency and to avoid false reporting. The last IC vertical overlap is between purposeful interactivity and cross-functional departmental expertise. In order to have the benefits of utilising diverse expertise, it is argued that purposeful conversations need to be implemented.

The above discussion indicated that the individual variables of both IC and excellence theory are interlinked and complement each other to ensure a synergised process. The essence of the next discussion is to display this synergy on *horizontal* level by illustrating that excellence theory characteristics need to be implemented *in conjunction with* IC elements to ensure a comprehensive strategic crisis communication process.

- **Horizontal overlap**

It is indicated that in order to implement IC, variables of both the excellence theory and IC are required. The main overlaps, predominantly relevant to the media as stakeholder group, will be discussed in Table 6.4:

Table 6.4: The horizontal overlap between IC and excellence theory

Horizontal overlap		
Excellence theory variables	IC variables	Description of overlap
1	c, a	By having purposeful conversations with the media, burning issues can be identified and proactively addressed before it evolves into crises.
2	c	When crisis communicators have easy access to top management, purposeful conversations could be arranged more easily between the media and top management during severe crises, which will increase the organisation's credibility.
3	a, b, c	As discussed earlier, two-way symmetrical communication, to facilitate purposeful interactivity, is the key criterion to build sustainable media relationships. Furthermore, as IC is constructed around coordinating the entire network of stakeholders' communication activities, purposeful stakeholder interactivity is vital as changes in one stakeholder group tend to have a domino effect on other stakeholders.
4	c	This overlap links with the previous overlap – a sound internal organisational climate is necessary in order to have purposeful conversations with the media.
5	c,f	Symmetrical internal communication will facilitate purposeful interactivity and contribute towards the alignment of internal and external messages.
6	c	An organic organisational structure will instil purposeful interactivity among stakeholders through two-way communication.
7	a,b,c	Recognising that the organisation operates in a volatile environment, places higher pressure on the organisation to determine the media's wants and needs. The latter will place higher emphasis on a stakeholder mindset that focuses on building sustainable media relationships through purposeful conversations to detect possible issues that could result into crises. The media can be used to simultaneously send messages efficiently and to receive messages from stakeholders, which holds a mutual benefit for both.

Although more overlaps could be identified, the above table highlights that IC and excellence theory variables should be integrated as a whole to ensure a comprehensive strategic crisis communication process. To further contribute towards facilitating a strategic crisis communication process, the advisory role of the crisis communicators on the various stages is discussed in the following section, serving as the third building block for an *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) process.

6.3.4 Advisory role of crisis communication

From the focus group discussion it is evident that the worth of (crisis) communication on strategic level is executed through the *advisory* function that (crisis) communicators provide to top management on the outcome of their business decisions. This quality empowers communication to be viewed as a strategic function. It is therefore argued that the advisory role correlates with the *boundary spanning* role of communication emphasised in the literature review as follows: Through the application of boundary spanning and environmental scanning, the organisation is enabled to proactively adapt to changes in stakeholder expectations and secondly, as a result of early recognition, management of

issues and the participation of stakeholders in the decision making process, it creates a competitive advantage for the organisation. Boundary spanners can therefore scan the environment for possible issues that might result into crises and subsequently, due to the early detection of issues, they could advise top management in the decision making processes. It is thus argued that this *advisory* function highlights the importance of crisis communication on top management level, thereby raising it to a *strategic* function.

It is further argued that this advisory function should be practiced on each stage of the crisis communication process in order to ensure that it is a strategic process. Hence, it is argued that crisis communicators should continuously interact with the media proactively, reactively and also after a crisis event to steer the organisation in the correct direction by advising top management on the outcome of their business decisions based on dialogue with the media.

6.3.5 Towards a definition of Integrated Crisis Communication (ICC)

From the focus group and one-on-one interview discussions, it became apparent that proactive crisis communication is not evident in practice, as the *focus of an organisation will always be to position itself optimally; it will never be to plan for a crisis*. Conversely, the literature review proposed that certain contingency plans need to be in place in order to manage a crisis effectively. It is affirmed by crisis theorists that by implementing proactive crisis strategies, an organisation will have crises of shorter duration and messages will be received more effectively, it will reduce response time and lessen the possibility of inaccurate messages and decrease organisational damage. Furthermore, it was even argued that proactive crisis management *can avoid the crisis altogether*. Consequently, it was argued that the value of implementing proactive crisis communication strategies cannot be ignored. Furthermore, it was highlighted that the communication actions required proactively to contribute towards a strategic crisis communication process will by design be evident upon the implementation of IC. It was also argued that these IC actions not only contribute towards proactive crisis communication, but also facilitates strategic communication through stakeholder relationship building within the organisation as a whole. Therefore, it can be argued that once an organisation implements *integrated crisis communication (ICC)*, which is based on IC principles, it will provide the foundation necessary to manage a crisis effectively (the foundation thus serves as proactive crisis communication). This building block will serve as the essence of the proposed *integrated crisis communication (ICC)*

framework. The principles of integrated crisis communication will firstly be discussed below as it underlies the definition, which will be proposed thereafter.

6.3.5.1 *Integrated crisis communication (ICC) principles*

As this study focuses on *crisis* communication, the specific IC variables necessary to facilitate *effective* crisis communication with the media, from a strategic perspective, is encapsulated by the *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) concept. ICC highlights the following key principles, which correlates with the strategic drivers of IC as posed in the literature review:

- Creating and nourishing relationships through two-way communication

Sustainable relationships should be cultivated with the media through two-way communication. Based on the argument posed in the literature, the facilitation of two-way communication implies that the organisation and media will constantly trade places of sender and receiver. This two-way communication relationship with the media could assist the organisation to receive more favourable media reporting during a crisis.

Furthermore, it was indicated that the most important proactive action necessary for strategic crisis communication with the *media*, is *building sustainable media relationships*, despite having journalists that are solely focused on sensation. Therefore, *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) focuses on practicing two-way communication to build sustainable media relationships proactively, which will assist the organisation in communicating upon a crisis occurrence.

- Creation of purposeful interactivity

The principle of *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) underlines that the institutionalisation of two-way communication with the media will facilitate feedback and dialogue between the organisation and the media. Therefore, the focus should be to *listen and learn* from the media as opposed to *tell and sell*. This purposeful interactivity will also create a higher level of credibility for the organisation as stipulated in the literature.

- Stakeholder centricity

Integrated crisis communication (ICC) holds that the organisation should not just focus on building relationships with the media, but to build *partnerships* with all stakeholders prior to crises. These partnerships encapsulate IC qualities, as partnership building is achieved through *open, honest dialogue* in order to achieve equitable solutions to emerging issues. These stakeholder partnerships will keep stakeholders in cooperative balance with the organisation.

- Cross-functional departmental planning and monitoring

Integrated crisis communication (ICC) promotes consistent interaction between organisational departments. During a crisis, an expert on the particular crisis should be consulted in all crisis communication activities, in order to provide the media with accurate responses. Therefore, diverse expertise within the organisation should be integrated, in which experiences are shared in order to develop sufficient responses during crises.

- Integrated agency

As argued in the literature, organisations have to redefine communication structures through the integration of communication activities in order to ensure organisational survival. To provide consistent messages to the media in a crisis, all communication activities need to be integrated; this was evident in the integration of activities in Absa's Group Communication and Marketing Department. The need for practitioners to act as liaisons between the organisation and external stakeholders and to work together was also underlined. All messages need to be consistent and cannot be contradictory from an IC perspective.

- Internal and external message alignment

Linked to the previous argument, *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) underlines that messages communicated to the media should be consistent with internal messages, in order to maintain credibility during a crisis. This correlates with the argument in the literature that, in order to avoid

fragmented communication which can have a negative impact on the organisation's image, internal and external communication messages should be harmonised.

- A strategic communication process

Integrated crisis communication is strategic in that it proposes that crisis communicators must act as boundary spanners to detect issues of concern and advise top management on the outcome of their business decisions. This correlates with the point that the *renaissance communicator* should function by providing solutions to important organisational problems driven by constant environmental changes.

- It promotes communication excellence

As stipulated previously, a correlation exists between IC and excellence theory variables. As *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) focuses on the implementation of IC within crisis situations, an overlap with the excellence theory is evident. Table 6.5 highlights the relation between excellence theory variables and *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) with the media specifically. The table is structured based on the discussion in the literature, where the excellence theory elements is specifically applied on programme, organisational and departmental level in order to instil an organisation of communication excellence. It is important to note that only the variables applicable on each level to illustrate the correlation between excellence theory and *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) are included.

Table 6.5: The applicability of excellence theory variables to integrated crisis communication (ICC) with the media

Excellence theory variable	Application to integrated crisis communication (ICC) with the media
Programme level	
<p>1. Managed strategically: Communication programmes should be managed strategically; thus it should be based on <i>research and environmental scanning</i>. Diverse techniques are applied instead of habitual techniques.</p>	<p>IC is strategic in nature, contributing to the strategic thinking processes of the organisation. As indicated above, <i>integrated crisis communication (ICC)</i> is a strategic communication process and, inter alia, contributes to the <i>early detection of issues</i> and the application of <i>research</i> in order to understand the cause of the problem, as crisis communicators act as boundary spanners between the organisation and the media.</p>
Departmental level	
<p>2. A single or integrated department: It is argued that in order to facilitate the strategic management of public relations, and to ensure that PR contributes to the overall strategic organisational objectives, organisations must implement an <i>IC</i> department for all PR activities, or develop a method to coordinate programmes of various departments. This implies that all communication functions should be coordinated by the PR department.</p>	<p>As indicated above, integrated crisis communication promotes an IC agency to ensure that all communication messages to the media are consistent.</p>
<p>3. Separate function from marketing: Although the excellence theory proposes an integrated PR function, it is argued that the function should not be integrated with other departments whose core focus is not on communication. PR should thus not be a subsidiary to other departments such as marketing.</p>	<p>Although this characteristic contrasts with the previous principle <i>integrated crisis communication (ICC)</i> places emphasis on <i>cross functional planning and monitoring</i>. Therefore, the focus is not so much placed on the integration of marketing and PR functions, but the ability of these functions to complement each other by an integrated relationship. The value of communication and PR cannot be replaced by marketing and vice versa. The purpose is more on generating synergy between various communication messages in order to provide consistent and accurate messages to the media to sufficiently resolve a crisis.</p>
<p>4. Direct reporting to senior management: The PR manager should directly report to senior managers who are part of the dominant coalition.</p>	<p><i>Integrated crisis communication (ICC)</i> promotes the function of boundary spanning to advise top management on the outcome of their business decisions during a crisis. As communicators will have a relationship with the media, they will know exactly what the latest development in the crisis is and what perceptions are created among the various stakeholder groups – communicators can then assist senior management to make decisions accordingly.</p>
<p>5. Two-way symmetrical communication model: This model attempts to balance the interest of the organisation with the interests of stakeholders. Symmetrical communicators are loyal to the organisation and to the public they serve. Two-way symmetrical communication will result in better relationship building.</p>	<p>IC is focused on communicating <i>with</i> the media, not <i>to</i> them. Dialogue will ensure that the media are active, interactive and equal participants of a continuing communication process.</p>

Organisational level	
<p>6. Participative organisational culture: A participative rather than an authoritarian organisation culture should be employed. Participative cultures pull employees together to collectively accomplish the mission of the organisation. These organisations also favour innovation and are adaptive to new ideas.</p>	<p>It is evident that a participative culture is necessary in <i>integrated crisis communication</i> (ICC) as it proposes that internal and external messages should be integrated in order to avoid fragmented messages. This could only be achieved by a sound internal organisational climate facilitated by an organisational culture that pulls employees together as one collective entity to achieve the organisational mission.</p>
<p>7. Symmetrical internal communication structure: The excellence theory holds that organisations should practice symmetrical internal communication which also supports the participative culture of the organisation through knowledge sharing and cooperation among employees.</p>	<p>Message fragmentation is avoided through the integration of internal and external messages and the alignment of all messages with the organisational mission and brand. This will require a symmetrical, two-way internal communication structure in order to deliver accurate messages to the media during a crisis.</p>
<p>8. Organic organisational structure: The traditional mechanistic view of the organisation is replaced with a less bureaucratic, organic structure. Employees have easy access to top management who welcomes input from staff.</p>	<p>An organic organisational structure is ideal for the sufficient implementation of <i>integrated crisis communication</i> (ICC) as two-way communication in order to align internal and external messages requires such a structure.</p>
<p>9. The organisation operates in a complex, volatile environment: Modern organisations operate in a volatile environment and have to be flexible in order to survive.</p>	<p>Organisations have to know what is happening in their environments in order to survive. As indicated, <i>integrated crisis communication</i> (ICC) also promotes the notion of boundary spanners, in which communicators scan the environment for possible crises and act as liaisons between the organisation and stakeholders. Sustainable relationships with the media will also ensure that communicators are always updated with the latest concerns of customers.</p>

From the above correlation it is evident that the excellence concept provides a favourable environment for *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) to permeate. Based on the above principles, the following definition is proposed:

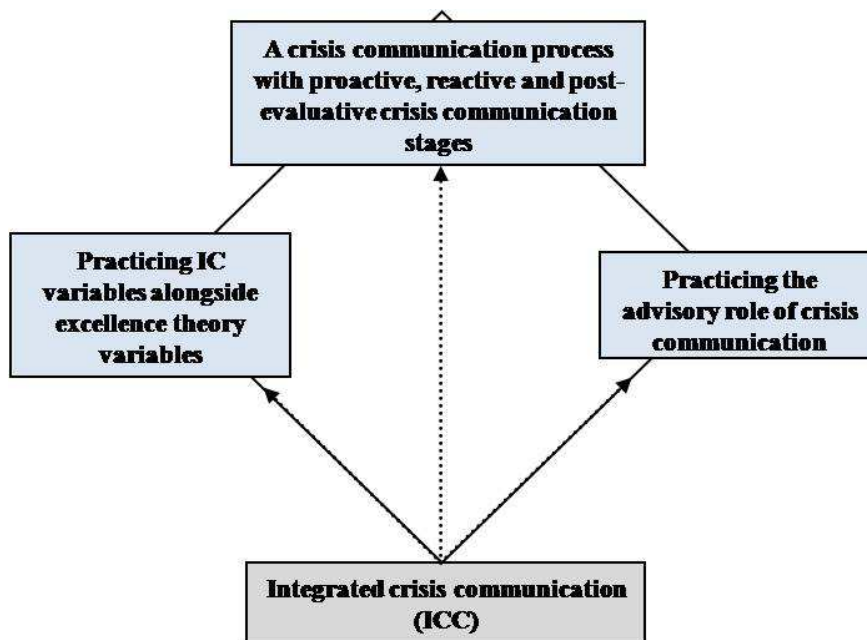
6.3.5.2 Definition of integrated crisis communication (ICC)

The definition proposed for integrated crisis communication is based on the definition of IC proposed in the literature review. Because integrated crisis communication (ICC) is specifically focused on crisis scenarios, this definition of IC is adapted to address strategic stakeholder relationship building with the *media* as stakeholder group during a *crisis* and can therefore be defined as:

An IC process in which two-way communication is utilised to build sustainable media relationships which will serve as the platform for purposeful dialogue between the media and the organisation before, during and after a crisis.

From the above discussion, it became apparent that through the implementation of *integrated crisis communication* (ICC), the other three building blocks of the framework will be achievable as indicated in. Figure 6.1:

Figure 6.1: Applying integrated crisis communication (ICC) to achieve the other building blocks of the framework



Based on the above, the integrated crisis communication framework to manage crisis communication strategically is discussed and illustrated in the following section.

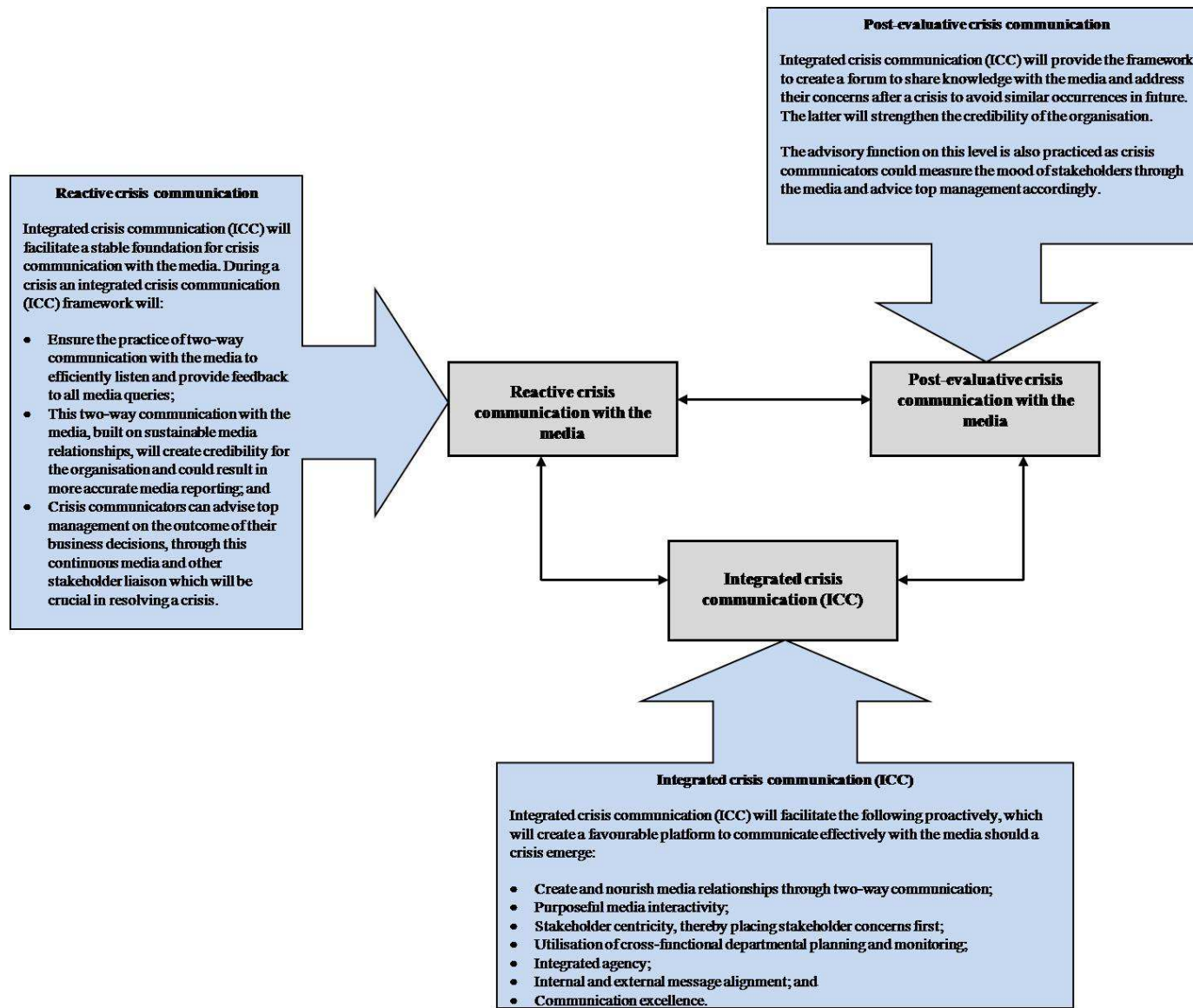
6.4 THE INTEGRATED CRISIS COMMUNICATION (ICC) FRAMEWORK

In the above discussion the four building blocks of the integrated crisis communication framework are highlighted and it is argued that integrated crisis communication (ICC) needs to be implemented to achieve and serve as foundation for the other building blocks. Integrated crisis communication (ICC) creates a suitable environment for the implementation of a crisis communication process with proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages; practicing the advisory crisis communication function and practicing IC variables alongside excellence theory variables.

It is proposed that integrated crisis communication (ICC) can facilitate strategic stakeholder relationship building with the media to detect, among others, issues of concern that need to be addressed to avoid possible crises. The advisory role of communication has been highlighted and it was argued that crisis communicators should advise top management on the outcome of their business decisions. Although this proposed structure will minimise the event of a crisis, it does not eliminate it. In the event of a crisis, integrated crisis communication (ICC) will assist the organisation to communicate effectively by maintaining a two-way communication relationship with the media to address queries and to advise top management on the outcome of their business decisions. After a crisis, the integrated crisis communication (ICC) framework further proposes the utilisation of two-way stakeholder communication to create a listening and learning culture to assist the organisation to avoid similar occurrences in future.

The integrated crisis communication (ICC) framework to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media is proposed in Figure 6.2:

Figure 6.2: An integrated crisis communication (ICC) framework for strategic crisis communication with the media



From the above figure it is evident that an integrated crisis communication (ICC) framework is a process that has proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages. Although the proactive crisis communication stages is not regarded as a separate stage, the implementation of integrated crisis communication (ICC) serves as the foundation for effective reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication with the media, and thereby fulfils the necessary proactive crisis communication measures. Integrated crisis communication (ICC) should always be practiced within the organisation to contribute towards effective communication with all stakeholders, while the reactive crisis communication stage, followed by post-evaluative crisis communication stage, will only be practiced upon a crisis occurrence. Integrated crisis communication (ICC) focuses on building and maintaining sustainable media relationships which could therefore also serve as a prevention and preparation function to communicate effectively with the media during a crisis.

As the research problem focuses on exploring crisis communication processes' lack of strategy to contribute towards effective crisis communication with the media, it is vital to highlight the integrated crisis communication (ICC) framework's facilitation towards a *strategic* crisis communication process. Besides the application of IC principles, which is the key facilitator of a strategic crisis communication process for this study, it is further achieved through: the proposition of a crisis communication structure with proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages, which correlate with the stages of a strategic management plan; the promotion of stakeholder relationship building through two-way communication, since organisations rely on the goodwill of stakeholders for survival, which highlights the necessity of stakeholder relationship building on strategic level; and the facilitation of the advisory role of crisis communication in which crisis communicators assist top management on the outcome of their business decisions.

6.5 SUMMARY

This chapter proposed an integrated crisis communication (ICC) framework to facilitate strategic crisis communication with the media.

The relation of the four key findings identified in the previous chapter with IC was drawn, in order to illustrate how IC could be applied to facilitate a strategic crisis communication process. These four findings collectively formed the building blocks of the proposed integrated crisis communication (ICC) framework, which includes the implementation of a crisis communication process with proactive,

reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages; the application of the advisory crisis communication function; the implementation of integrated crisis communication and the practice of IC variables alongside excellence theory variables. It became apparent that by implementing integrated crisis communication (ICC), the other building blocks would be achievable. Furthermore, integrated crisis communication (ICC) serves as a substitute for proactive crisis communication, as it was argued that the implementation of integrated crisis communication (ICC) provides the foundation necessary to manage and resolve a crisis effectively.

The proposed integrated crisis communication (ICC) framework is based on the argument that the practicing of IC principles within crisis situations provides a strategic crisis communication process for effective communication with the media.

The next chapter provides a conclusion for this study and a summary of the main findings, limitations and strengths of this study, as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

[It is] “imperative that organisations proactively manage their reputation through an ongoing, integrated approach to crisis management.” (Arguile 2009:8).

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study explored the lack of strategic crisis communication processes which could contribute towards ineffective crisis communication with the media. The research problem developed from theorists arguing that crisis communication is usually not regarded as a strategic process, as organisational managers usually regard crisis management as an insignificant activity (Pollard & Hotho 2006:726). Furthermore, absent managers within crisis management processes (Marra 1992:3), withdrawal of leaders from crises as they are afraid they might be held accountable (Ulmer et al 2007:51), passive attitudes towards crises (Barton 2001:212) and the perception that the field of crisis management is still in its infancy (Mitroff, Shrivastava & Udwadia 1987:285; Mitroff et al 1992:236; Richardson 1994:62; Mostafa et al 2004:401) are some of the reasons further identified for the lack of strategic crisis processes. More importantly, a core focus of the study was that, if *communication* as a discipline is not regarded as a strategic function, crisis communication will also not be practiced strategically (Squier 2009). However, the need for sufficient, strategic crisis communication processes is essential, as crises threaten the strategic objectives of an organisation (Richardson 1994:63; Preble 1997:780).

The lack of strategic crisis communication was addressed through proposing the implementation of an *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) framework, in which crisis communication should be viewed as a strategic function through predominantly utilising two-way communication to build sustainable media relationships. The latter correlates with the argument posed in the literature that, *long-term stakeholder relationship building* is the communication discipline's core contribution towards strategic management (Grunig & Repper 1992:117; Likely 2003:19).

An *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) framework was built on IC literature, which was defined as a strategic process that facilitates long-term profitable relationships with all stakeholders. The study specifically focused on the *news media* as stakeholder group, as it was argued that the media formulates public perception during a crisis. Consequently, it was argued that it is vital to manage and build

relationships with the media in order to increase the possibility of favourable media reporting during a crisis. Furthermore, the study also particularly focused on the *financial industry*, as it was argued that this industry is more sensitive towards crises and media reporting compared to other industries, as financial services providers work with people's money (Squier 2009) and is subsequently more susceptible to media reporting. Against this background, the study aimed to address the following research problem:

To explore whether existing crisis communication processes contribute to strategic crisis communication with the media through an integrated crisis communication approach employed by a South African financial services provider.

The purpose of the research was thus twofold. The first objective of the research was to determine whether existing crisis communication and management processes in theory and in practice contribute towards *strategic* crisis communication with the *media*, and secondly, the need for an *integrated* crisis communication framework was highlighted to ensure that *crisis communication* with the media is efficiently and strategically managed.

The research problem was addressed by firstly exploring existing literature, after which a qualitative case study was conducted *in practice* with Absa's Group Marketing and Corporate Affairs Department through a threefold data collection approach. This approach consisted of a one-on-one interview, a focus group and an analysis of Absa's draft crisis communication plan.

This chapter will provide a summary of the main findings, limitations and strengths of this study obtained from the literature and case study. Recommendations for future research will also be highlighted.

7.2 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

Within this section, a few important general insights, followed by the four main findings that were obtained from the research will be briefly discussed.

7.2.1 General insights

Both the literature review and case study indicated that the *financial* industry is indeed more sensitive to the media reporting on organisational negligence than other industries, as these organisations work with clients' money. Furthermore, it was also indicated that consumers are more educated than in the past, which highlights the necessity for sufficient crisis communication processes within this industry.

To study crisis communication from a strategic perspective, a predominant part of this study was devoted to strategy and strategic communication in general. The focus group participants regarded strategy as *opportunity divided by capacity*, whereas the interviewee supported the definition of strategy posed in the literature as a guideline or roadmap to achieve organisational objectives. However, both the interviewee and the focus group participants did not state that they view strategy in terms of a planning, implementation and evaluation structure. Despite this, it was still argued that a crisis communication process, translated in terms of proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages for the purpose of this study, will be necessary for a crisis communication process to be strategic. This correlates with the definition of strategic management proposed as the *formulation, implementation and responsibility for plans and related activities vital for the central direction and functioning of the enterprise as a whole*.

The interviewee argued that strategic *communication* plans must be aligned with the overall organisational strategy, which correlates with arguments posed in the literature review. Furthermore, the interviewee stipulated that communication's contribution towards the achievement of organisational strategy has to be illustrated in order to erase the perception of communication being merely a support function. It was argued in the literature review that, to highlight communication's role on strategic level, the application of two-way communication as a stakeholder relationship building tool must be emphasised. Most importantly, it was stipulated in the focus group that communication becomes strategic once communicators act as *boundary spanners* and advise top management on the outcome of their business decisions. The focus group participants further stipulated that the latter role of communication moves communication as a discipline from a technical to a strategic function, which supported the arguments in the literature review.

The importance of two-way communication was supported by the participants and interviewee, but only as a matter of course and not as a *stakeholder relationship building tool* as proposed in the

literature review. The participants also stipulated that proactively, two-way communication should be used to *influence and inform* the media and reactively to *educate* the media. However, it was argued that sustainable media relationships will not always ensure favourable media reporting; what will be reported largely depends on the individual journalist and publication's level of integrity. Despite the latter, it was indicated that strong media relationships could assist in more accurate reporting during a crisis.

The research indicated that crisis communication specifically is mainly regarded as a *reactive* function. The participants indicated that the agenda will never be to manage a crisis but rather to position Absa optimally. The participants also stated that evaluation after a crisis is indeed conducted within Absa, but a two-way communication forum to share knowledge, as proposed in this study, has not been considered, and communication after a crisis is predominantly one-way.

Against this background, four dominant findings were derived, which served as the main building blocks for an *integrated crisis communication* framework. It was argued that the implementation of integrated crisis communication serves as a foundation for the achievement of the other building blocks. These building blocks are briefly summarised below:

7.2.2 A crisis communication process with proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages

Although not supported by the case study participants, for the purpose of this study a crisis communication process translated into proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages, which were built on the proposed reciprocal relationship between crisis communication and crisis management. The researcher argued that crisis communication should be practiced before, during and after a crisis, not only as a reactive function. Consequently, it was argued that crisis communication encapsulates and is practiced on each stage of the crisis management process, which therefore also necessitates a crisis communication process with proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication stages. Such a crisis communication structure was thus a key element to ensure a strategic crisis communication process for the purpose of this study.

7.2.3 Practicing the advisory role of crisis communication

In line with the above crisis communication process structure to contribute towards a *strategic* crisis communication, the focus group participants indicated that communication's value as a strategic function lies within the communicator's ability to advise top management on the outcome of their business decisions. This correlates with the proposed boundary spanning role in the literature review. Crisis communicators have to act proactively, reactively and post-evaluatively as advisors upon a crisis occurrence. This would optimally be achieved through continuous two-way communication with the media and other stakeholders.

7.2.4 Practicing IC variables alongside excellence theory variables

It was argued in the literature review that IC and excellence theory variables have to be applied in conjunction with the above crisis communication structure to ensure a comprehensive strategic crisis communication process. However, it was discovered during data collection that not all these variables are applicable on every stage of the crisis communication process in practice. More importantly, in theory IC variables are necessary for the implementation of the excellence theory and *vice versa*. This overlap was illustrated in the previous chapter, by proposing a vertical overlap *within* IC and excellence theory variables respectively, and a horizontal overlap *between* IC and excellence theory variables, which specifically highlighted the complimentary relationship between IC and the excellence theory variables. The illustration indicated that IC and excellence theory variables should be practiced as a whole in an integrated manner to contribute towards a strategic crisis communication process.

7.2.5 The implementation of *integrated crisis communication* (ICC)

Integrated crisis communication (ICC) is built on the notion that two-way communication with the media not only facilitates purposeful dialogue between the organisation and the media, but simultaneously provides the preparatory foundation needed to communicate strategically with the media during and after a crisis. The focus group participants argued that proactive crisis communication will never be practiced, as the focus of the organisation will always be on positioning itself optimally and not to manage crises. However, as argued by numerous crisis theorists, the value of proactive crisis communication plans cannot be ignored, as crises have the potential to threaten the future existence of the organisation. The study proposes that *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) has to be implemented not only to manage issues proactively, but also to facilitate sustainable

stakeholder relationship building. Reactive crisis communication and post-evaluative crisis communication will only be practiced when these issues evolve into crises. Proactive crisis communication was thus rephrased to *integrated crisis communication* (ICC), to highlight the necessity of a *broader* function that is not only implemented for crisis situations, but a function that ensures sustainable stakeholder relationship building through two-way communication in general. Integrated crisis communication holds the following principles as outlined in the previous chapter:

- Creating and nourishing relationships through two-way communication;
- Creating purposeful interactivity;
- Stakeholder centricity;
- Cross-functional departmental planning and monitoring;
- Integrated agency;
- Aligning messages internally and externally;
- Strategic communication process; and
- Promoting communication excellence.

In line with the above principles, *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) was defined as *an IC process in which two-way communication is utilised to build sustainable media relationships which will serve as the platform for purposeful dialogue between the media and an organisation before, during and after a crisis*. This definition specifically highlights that *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) for the purpose of this study, serves as a stakeholder relationship building function and, simultaneously, acts as a proactive crisis communication function through building sustainable media relationships from a strategic perspective to assist the organisation to communicate effectively during and after a crisis.

7.3 LIMITATIONS

The following limitations were identified in the study:

To address the issue of *strategic* crisis communication a myriad of elements had to be considered in the literature. Despite contributing towards a comprehensive study, it also at times caused long-winded discussions to bring certain viewpoints across.

Although triangulation and a pilot test were conducted, the generalisability of the study could be questionable, as Absa cannot be an accurate representation of all successful South African financial services providers. However, the scope of qualitative research is limited, and a sample in qualitative research is not meant to be a representation of the population, but rather a generalisation to theory. Regardless of the latter, the purpose of utilising a case study was specifically to compare *theory* and *practice* and can serve as a benchmark for future research.

This study only proposed an integrated crisis communication *framework*, thereby providing the guideline in order to instil effective crisis communication with the media. The detailed elements needed to implement this framework have not been addressed in detail. However, the exact elements that have to be practiced on each stage of the proposed framework could be explored in future research.

This study promoted a strategic crisis communication process through predominantly focusing on stakeholder relationship building, and it was argued that communication's worth on strategic level lies within stakeholder relationship building through two-way communication. However, other vital elements that needs to be considered in order to contribute towards a strategic process, such as the alignment of the crisis communication strategy with the overall communication and organisational strategy, has not been addressed.

7.4 STRENGTHS

Various strengths have been identified which contributed towards the uniqueness of the study:

Limited research has been conducted on *strategic* crisis communication. Although it was stipulated in the research that the lack of strategy contributes towards unsuccessful crisis communication practices, limited research highlighted that a strategic structure is necessary for effective crisis communication, or how strategy could be incorporated in crisis communication processes.

The study indicated that crisis communication has a reciprocal relationship with crisis management; thereby emphasising that crisis communication is not only a reactive process. Two-way crisis communication has to be practiced before, during and after a crisis. The lack of focus on proactive and post-evaluative crisis communication, moving away from the dominant reactive crisis communication viewpoint, is thus also addressed.

Strategy was addressed from numerous angles, including a process translated into planning, implementing and evaluating stages, the building of sustainable stakeholder relationships, practicing the advisory role of crisis communication on each stage of the crisis communication process and applying IC and excellence theory principles.

A unique coherence between IC and the excellence theory variables were identified. It thus became evident that there is a complementary relationship between these variables.

The proposition of *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) to facilitate *strategic* crisis communication with the media is unique and serves as a contribution towards crisis communication literature. It was also highlighted that *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) needs to be implemented by the organisation not only to communicate effectively with the media during and after a crisis, but to build sustainable stakeholder relationships in general. The *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) framework could thus be applied to any stakeholder group, not just the media.

The study also emphasised the worth of practicing communication strategically. Communicators have to act as advisors to top management on the outcome of business decisions. As argued previously, communication has to be practiced on strategic level in order to enable a strategic crisis communication process.

The worth of two-way communication to build sustainable stakeholder relationships, not only for organisational survival, but also to ensure credibility within a crisis situation, was also addressed in this study. Two-way communication is often regarded as a matter of course, it should however, be consciously considered as a stakeholder relationship building tool.

7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As the study focused on the perspective of the organisation in crises scenarios, future research can explore the viewpoint of the media on how an organisational crisis should be managed. Insightful findings could be derived from such a study, as it could be discovered what information the media requires during a crisis and what they expect to be communicated during a crisis. Similarly, the focus could also be on the perspective of any other stakeholder group on a crisis, such as employees.

The study focused on highlighting the necessity of an *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) approach for a strategic crisis communication process. Other elements, such as the compilation of a formal crisis plan and conducting crisis simulation that also contributes towards a strategic process, can alternatively be researched.

The research proposed an integrated crisis communication approach; thereby focusing, among others, on the crisis communication process translated into proactive, reactive and post evaluative crisis communication stages. Future research can address the lack of post-evaluative crisis communication specifically through the installation of a two-way crisis communication forum, or solely focusing on *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) as a proactive crisis measure.

Furthermore, the value of stakeholder relationship building through two-way communication within crisis situations could also be measured. This study only highlighted the necessity thereof to instil a strategic crisis communication approach. Moreover, the value of relationships with the media during a crisis could also be addressed.

Lastly, as this study only proposed a *framework*, the elements that need to be practiced on each stage of the process could be discussed in detail. Hence, the focus of this type of research will be less of a guideline for a strategic crisis communication process, and more for the action plans required for successful crisis communication.

7.6 SUMMARY

This study focused on determining whether crisis communication processes in theory and in practice are strategic, to contribute towards effective crisis communication with the media. This problem was addressed through exploring existing literature and conducting a case study at Absa bank through a three-fold data collection approach consisting of a case study, focus group and an evaluation of a draft crisis communication plan.

It was argued that the implementation of *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) will serve as the foundation necessary to effectively communicate during and after a crisis. It is concluded that the principles of *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) will not only assist in managing and resolving a crisis effectively, but will also ensure sustainable stakeholder relationship building within the

organisation as a whole. “Not only are social partners part of developing our responses to a crisis, they are also each responsible for it” (Zuma 2009:1) therefore, *integrated crisis communication* (ICC) should be used to build sustainable relationships with the media, as they act as social partners of the organisation in resolving a crisis.

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ADDENDUM A: An elaboration on the actions to be implemented on each stage of the crisis management process

Proactive crisis management stage
General actions to consider during proactive crisis management
<p>a) Early warning system and environmental scanning</p> <p>Egelhoff and Sen (1992:443) define a crisis as “the result when an environmental threat interacts with an organisational weakness”. This definition highlights the importance of environmental scanning, which can be conducted by implementing a SWOT analysis (Preble 1997:770). The SWOT analysis, an acronym for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, highlights possible external opportunities and threats as well as internal strengths and weaknesses of an organisation in order to detect areas of concern. Wilson (1984:75) defines environmental scanning as the monitoring of current environmental happenings and the forecasting of happenings in the future. It is argued that there is a linkage between strategic planning and environmental scanning, which is especially applicable to the strategic focus of this study, as strategic planning focuses on building a stable relationship between an organisation and its external environment in order to successfully manage change from the outside (Wilson 1984:75; Hax 1984:19).</p> <p>By paying attention to internal and external happenings an organisation is allowed to respond promptly and sufficiently to crises (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt 1996:82). As stated by Bennet (2005:11), an early warning system identifies critical signs and prevents issues turning into crises. Similarly, Darling (1994:4), Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996:81), and Ucelli (2002:22), contend that early detection enables an organisation to avoid crises in totality or to better manage crises. Early warning systems pick up evidence of constant non-performance (Meyers & Halusha 1986:206). Environmental scanning or the implementation of an early warning system detects lingering issues which will enable the organisation to proactively resolve an issue before it evolves into a full blown crisis.</p>
<p>b) Crisis audit</p> <p>Meyers and Halusha (1986:218) state that organisations that operate in extreme volatility should conduct a crisis audit. As the modern business environment is characterised by constant change, the development of a crisis audit is inevitable. A crisis audit consist of two sub-audits namely a <i>crisis susceptibility audit</i> and a <i>crisis capability audit</i> (Meyers & Halusha 1986:219). A crisis susceptibility audit exposes the types of crises an organisation is likely to encounter whereas a crisis capability audit examines an organisation’s ability to cope with a sudden crisis.</p>
<p>c) Corporate reputation</p> <p>Stocker (1997:197) and Modzelewski (1990:13) argue that a favourable corporate reputation prior to a crisis can assist an organisation to better manage and resolve a crisis. Van Riel (1995:27) states that the positive or negative reputation of an organisation is determined by “the signals that it gives about its nature”. Corporate reputation is defined as an assessment that stakeholders make about an organisation (Coombs & Holladay 2006:123). In order to emphasise the importance of a favourable reputation prior to a crisis, Coombs and Holladay (2006:121) claim that “an organisation with a more favourable prior reputation will still have a stronger post-crisis reputation because it has more reputation capital to spend than an organisation with an unfavourable or neutral prior reputation. As a result, a favourable prior reputation means an organisation suffers less and rebounds more quickly after a crisis”. Consequently, an organisation should at all times work to establish a favourable perception among stakeholders through open and honest business conduct, as such an organisation will suffer less damage from a crisis.</p>
<p>d) Crisis management team and spokesperson</p> <p>A crisis management team and spokesperson should be designated prior to a crisis in order to react effectively to a crisis. According to Barton (2001:207), a crisis team should include technical experts, an attorney, a public relations manager, a financial manager, an information technology manager and a public</p>

affairs expert. However, Bloom (2008a:[sp]) points out that a management team should still be available to run the organisation as usual. A primary spokesperson should also be appointed in order to reduce the chance of contradicting statements; “speaking with one voice is more crucial in a crisis than during normal operations” (Fearn-Banks 2007:25). There is a mixed opinion in the literature on whether the CEO should fulfil the role as spokesperson (Fearn-Banks 2007:25; Maynard 1993:54; Barton 2001:68; Kaufmann, Kesner & Hansen 1994:38), however, according to the research conducted by MacLiam (2006:65), the choice of a spokesperson should depend on the *type* and *severity* of a crisis. The spokesperson should be a senior management member as it is important that this person should carry responsibility to make important decisions (Palumbo 1990:47).

e) Crisis control centre

Venter (1994:219) and Stocker (1997:198) argue that a separate space, located in a security area, should be allocated for the crisis team in order to manage the crisis. This area should be equipped with the necessary technical equipment such as phone lines, computers, fax and video conferencing facilities, satellite television and radio services (Stocker 1997:198).

f) Crisis training

Skinner et al (2005:291) highlights the importance of crisis training by stating that the manner in which a crisis is handled will affect an organisation’s image. This training process involves the entire organisation as senior management must be educated on how to deal with the media; middle management must know how to conduct a telephonic interview; switchboard employees must be informed of the correct procedure to direct queries during a crisis and human resources must be trained on how to manage staff during times of disaster (Skinner et al 2005:291). Without continuous training, management tend to act warily (Boin & Lagadec 2000:188). More importantly, spokespeople must receive media training in order to ensure that the correct message is communicated to key stakeholders (MacLiam 2006:62; Bloom 2008b:27).

g) Internal organisational climate

Elsubbaugh et al (2004:116) state that “we should create a supportive organisational culture for thinking about potential crises and crisis management which involves all the organisational levels ... we can do nothing without a favourable culture that support the crisis preparation process”. As stated previously, a sound internal organisational climate is vital in order to interact effectively with external stakeholders. Furthermore, Pearson and Mitroff (1993:54) argue that an organisation should develop an infrastructure of open and effective communication at all levels of the organisation. This highlights the importance of generating a stable internal climate through two-way symmetrical communication, a key characteristic of IC.

h) Issues management

Various crisis scholars (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt 1996:84; Murphy 1996:103; Verwey et al 2002:31; Seitel 2007:403) highlight the significance of issues management as a vital element of proactive crisis management. Issues management is defined by public relations counsellor, W. Howard Chase, as the “capacity to understand, mobilise, coordinate, and direct all strategic and policy planning functions, and all public affairs/public relations skills, toward [the] achievement of one objective: meaningful participation in creation of public policy that affects personal and institutional destiny” (Seitel 2007:403). As argued by Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996:85), issues management within a crisis context assists an organisation to identify issues that may have an impact on such an organisation’s well-being. Issues management is a five-step process that includes the identification of issues of concern, the analysis of each issue in order to determine its impact on stakeholders, the highlighting of strategy options that are available to an organisation, the implementation of an action plan, and the evaluation of qualities to determine whether organisational objectives have been achieved (Seitel 2007:403). Issues management can therefore be employed as a vital tool in proactive crisis management in order to identify and resolve issues before it evolves into crises.

Reactive crisis management stage

General actions to consider during reactive crisis management

a) Gather all the facts

Fearn-Banks (2007:43) emphasises the importance of gathering all the facts before communicating to key stakeholders, by arguing that a perception of unreliability will be instilled if information is disseminated as fact, when it actually has not been confirmed. Barton (2001:212) maintains that the following data need to be collected before a message can be formulated for a news conference: the number of staff members and expenditure; the level of growth an organisation has on the region's economy; a summary of the organisation's benevolence over the past three years; a list of the organisation's business partners, tax payments, any awards received; a list of laws that the organisation has to comply with; and profiles of products and services offered. In an argument of disclosure vs. non-disclosure, Kaufmann et al (1994:35) and MacLiam (2006:48), argue that the following questions should be answered in order to determine the correct strategy for the specific crisis at hand:

Could non-disclosure be fatal or lead to further damage?

Should the answer to the above question be positive, full disclosure should be provided.

Is your organisation the culprit or the victim?

Full disclosure might be the correct policy if the organisation is the victim in the crisis, but on the contrary, should it turn out that the organisation was negligent "it may be more important for firms to abide by the more cautious advice of corporate counsel to avoid damages in excess of those necessary to compensate victims" (Kaufmann et al 1994:36). However, the value of an apologetic stance upon the admission of guilt, as well as the disclosure of a recovery and preventative strategy should also be taken into consideration in order to protect an organisation's credibility.

Are the rumours surrounding the crisis worse than the facts?

If the rumours overpower the facts, it is vital to promptly communicate the truth.

Can the organisation afford to respond after the crisis?

An organisation that makes full disclosure, but fails to take corrective action, may increase their liability drastically. All victims should be compensated for all damages upon the admission of liability.

Can the organisation afford not to respond?

The consequences of non-disclosure should be taken into consideration. As argued before, non-disclosure might create a perception that an organisation has something to hide and therefore results in further rumour mongering. However, full disclosure is more significant when the crisis affects the organisational reputation.

b) Message formulation

Barton (2001:67) argues that there are three variables that have to be taken into consideration when preparing the message to stakeholders, namely, tone, content and the receiver. *Tone* refers to the temperament expressed in the response, for example, annoyed, apprehensive or optimistic. *Content* refers to whether fact, opinion or a combination of both will be communicated. When taking the *receiver* into consideration, the crisis team must establish how much knowledge does the recipient carry about the crisis and the organisation.

Post-evaluative crisis management stage

General actions to consider during post-evaluative crisis management

a) Organisational learning

In this crisis stage, organisational learning refers to the lessons learned from experiencing the crisis (Pearson & Mitroff 1993:54). The emphasis should be placed on rectifying current issues and improving future abilities (Pearson & Mitroff 1993:54). Crises can actually be beneficial towards an organisation as it promotes certain learning outcomes: failure of these highlight an under-recognised issue; it provides a clear description of a specific problem; it stimulates the search for solutions; crises generate a spirit of cooperation among internal constituencies; crises might result in the adjustment of risk tolerances; crises promote a variation in response strategies and it produces a greater degree of flexibility (Seeger et al 2005:82). Continuous feedback, generated from experience, is vital for effective crisis preparation (Boin & Lagadec 2000:189). This statement implies that the crisis management process is cyclical, as lessons learned are used in order to prepare for the next crisis. Mitroff (2004:45-46) claims that successful crisis management is not just the result of sufficient crisis management plans, but also the learning processes that a crisis instil which provide managers with the ability to envisage the onset of a new crisis.

b) Image restoration

Upon the aftermath of a crisis, an organisation has to determine what impact the crisis had on their image (Weiner 2006:5). Corporate image can be defined as the impression that stakeholders have about an organisation based on the experience that stakeholders had with the organisation (Benoit & Pang 2008:244). An organisational image is an important asset and stakeholders should be hesitant to conduct business with organisations that has a tarnished image (Benoit & Pang 2008:244). Image restoration expert, William L. Benoit, has developed an image repair theory in which he proposes the implementation of various strategies that can be applied already in the reactive stage of crisis management, in order to protect and repair a tarnished reputation.

ADDENDUM B: A critical evaluation of crisis management and crisis communication processes

Key/legend:

In order to clarify the categories presented on the left, the following descriptions are provided:

- **Steps:** The steps refer to the actions that each process consists of. These steps could either be chronological or a-chronological.
- **Key thrusts:** The main attributes of each model.
- **Process categorisation:** Each process will be analysed as a predominant proactive, reactive or post-evaluative process in which all the stages are applied.
- **Type of communication:** Whether the process utilises one-way or two-way communication will be an indication of whether the process has the potential for stakeholder relationship-building, which is a key element of IC that is required for strategic crisis communication.
- **Crisis theory most applicable:** A relation of the model towards the crisis theories as discussed in Chapter 3 will be provided to draw a correlation between existing crisis processes and theories. This correlation will also re-emphasise which theories and processes are strategic.

A) PROACTIVE CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION PROCESSES

Fink's stage process (Fink 1986:67-91; Palumbo 1990:12-22)

Steps

This process has five elements which is built on the crisis lifecycle phases that was discussed earlier:

1. Crisis forecasting

It is argued that organisations that plan proactively for a crisis occurrence, experience crises of shorter duration as opposed to organisations that failed to plan. The crisis management plan eliminates confusion, specifies the requirements and direct responsibility.

Crisis forecasting has four variables, namely, crisis impact value (measuring the level of possible damage of the crisis); probability factor (how likely is it that the situation will occur); degree of influence (what steps can be implemented to reduce the crisis's impact); and cost of intervention (the issue should be weighed against the cost of implementing such action).

2. Identify the crisis

Two reasons attribute to the importance of identifying a crisis. Firstly, crisis identification enables an organisation to manage the situation at hand; and secondly, after the identification of a crisis, it will allow an organisation to determine whether the situation can be controlled.

The following questions have to be addressed:

- If the issue is left unattended, will it escalate in intensity?
- Could this situation generate media attention?
- Will this situation interfere with the normal functioning of the organisation?
- Could the situation cause damage to the organisation's reputation?
- How will the organisation's bottom line be affected?

3. Isolating the crisis

It is argued that nothing should take priority over the crisis in order to effectively manage the crisis.

	<p>4. Managing the crisis The isolation and identification of the crisis will assist an organisation to determine what action plan could be implemented. The management of a crisis predominantly involves making proper decisions. It is vital that crisis plans must be flexible as crises are fluid. The crisis management team, which includes a spokesperson, must also be selected as a proactive measure.</p> <p>5. After the fall Even though the crisis is resolved, the organisation will still be held accountable to answer questions or to address certain issues regarding the crisis (especially to the news media). It is therefore vital to evaluate the competitor's crises as it is likely that one can experience the same crisis. A crisis evaluation team should be appointed to determine what exactly happened in order to prepare for a similar occurrence in future.</p>
Key thrusts	<p>Fink's process suggests that crisis forecasting should be conducted and a crisis plan should be developed in order to prepare for the possibility of a crisis occurrence. Should a crisis occur, Fink proposes that an organisation should identify the crisis, isolate the crisis and manage the crisis. It is vital to evaluate the situation after the crisis in order to prepare for future occurrences.</p> <p>It can therefore be argued that this process is also cyclical, as stipulated in Fink's crisis lifecycle, as discussed in Chapter 3, as aspects that have been identified during the evaluation phase should be applied in the crisis preparation phase in order to avoid similar happenings.</p>
Process categorisation (proactive/reactive/post-evaluative or all) and the contribution towards strategic crisis management	<p>This process possesses qualities of a process with all three stages with a core focus on <i>preparedness</i>.</p> <p>As the process holds proactive, reactive and post-evaluative characteristics, it is argued that it has the potential to be strategic if the stages are more specifically developed as proactive, reactive and post-evaluative, and communication be regarded as a core element that should encapsulate these stages.</p>
Type of communication utilised in order to ensure efficient communication with the media	<p>This process does recognise in the 'after the fall' phase that it is vital to have all the facts of the crisis to be able to answer queries from the media. It is also emphasised that the spokesperson has to be determined as a proactive measure. However, the process fails to address the importance of building sustainable <i>relationships</i> with the media during the crisis preparation phase. Vital elements of communication are therefore identified in the process, but it does not recognise two-way communication as an integrative process.</p>
Crisis theory most applicable	<p>As this process is also in line with the crisis lifecycle (which proposes that a crisis evolves in intensity) it is argued that the chaos theory is the most applicable to the process. This can be ascribed to the fact that the chaos theory poses similar arguments than this process: Systems follow certain patterns over time; organisations have to be flexible as crises are fluid; it suggests the need for continuous strategy development; and the chaos theory holds that learning is initiated through instability (which can be applied in order to prepare for the future in order to avoid such events).</p> <p>Although the chaos theory is predominantly proactive and reactive, it is also in line with the process's predominant preventative focus.</p>

Pearson and Clair's theoretical process of crisis management (Pearson & Clair 1998:66-73; Hale et al 2005:115)	
Steps	<p>This process does not have specific crisis management steps (since it is a theoretical process), but the process is based on the following propositions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A crisis generates both success and failure options for an organisation and its stakeholders; • Management's perceptions about risk influence the adoption of crisis management plans; • Crisis preparation can develop too much faith that leads to management believing that their organisation is not vulnerable to a crisis; • The wearing down of individual and shared assumptions during crisis events among victims and organisational stakeholders are likely to result in outcomes of failure; • Organisations that appoint crisis management teams to prepare for and manage a crisis will experience greater success in managing the crisis as oppose to organisations that ascribe the crisis responsibility to a single individual; • Organisations that build sustainable relationships through information sharing with stakeholders prior to a crisis event will experience a greater level of success in managing the crisis; and • A higher degree of success in crisis management will be achieved if information is disseminated quickly and accurately. <p>The strength of stakeholder relationships (especially with the media) will influence the success outcome of the crisis. Favourable media exposure (due to strong relationships with the media) will increase crisis management success.</p>
Key thrusts	<p>This process proposes that any crisis results in various degrees of success and failure. During a crisis, no organisation will react entirely effective or ineffective. The process further states that organisations will be more successful in managing a crisis if sustainable relationships are built prior to a crisis. These relationships or alliances are built through information sharing (two-way communication) between an organisation and its stakeholders. This characteristic is a key element of this study as already discussed.</p>
Process categorisation (proactive/reactive/post-evaluative or all) and the contribution towards strategic crisis management	<p>Although this process does not have definite steps for implementation, it is argued that the process is predominantly <i>proactive</i>, as the core focus of the process is to build sustainable relationships with stakeholders and how these relationships can be utilised to obtain positive media coverage.</p> <p>The process has the ability to empower communication as a strategic function. However, the process is not a combined process and will therefore not be regarded as strategic.</p>
Type of communication utilised in order to ensure efficient communication with the media	<p>The process fails to portray that communication should be a combined process, and therefore practiced proactively, reactively and post-evaluatively.</p>
Crisis theory most applicable	<p>The process does not possess qualities of a combined process, but it does place the necessary focus on the importance of two-way communication with stakeholders in order to build sustainable relationships. Thus, it can be argued that crisis theories that place high emphasis on communication could be applied to this theory. The situational theory of publics or the stakeholder</p>

	theory are most applicable to this process as they focus on the importance of identifying stakeholders/publics in order to enable an organisation to build strategic alliances with them.
B) REACTIVE CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION PROCESSES	
Meyers and Holusha's process (Meyers & Holusha 1986:207-216)	
Steps	<p>This process is based on four considerations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dimension Detecting the extent of the trouble foreseen. 2. Control Management's ability to influence the external environment. 3. Time The amount of time an organisation has to react to a crisis. 4. Options The quantity and quality of options that an organisation has available to address the crisis.
Key thrusts	<p>It is argued that the manner in which the above factors relate, indicates what management tools have to be applied. The following scenarios are possible:</p> <p>a) Dimension vs. control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High dimension, low control An organisation in this situation's future existence is threatened, as the crisis poses a great threat to the organisation while the organisation has little control over the situation. • High dimension, high control This situation is also serious as the crisis poses a great threat to the organisation, but the organisation also has high levels of control to address the issue. • Low dimension, high control This situation holds little danger for the organisation and the organisation has a high level of control over the situation. However, it is argued that the situation can evolve in intensity and pose a higher threat to the organisation. <p>It is vital that the organisation has control over its environment as a rule. When a crisis strikes, the organisation will be more prepared to deal with the situation.</p> <p>b) Time vs. options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little time, little options This is the most serious situation as organisations have to make decisions fast with limited options available. • Little time, ample options This situation also requires a quick reaction, but with various options available.
Process	categorisation This framework will assist the crisis manager to detect the seriousness of a

<p>(proactive/reactive/post-evaluative or all) and the contribution towards strategic crisis management</p>	<p>situation and to implement the most appropriate response.</p> <p>Although the development of such a framework proposes a sense of proactivity, this process is predominantly <i>reactive</i>, as the strategies are focused on analysing the nature of the crisis occurrence itself.</p> <p>The process does recognise the importance of management involvement in crisis management, but it does not stipulate that the crisis management team should be part of the top management of the organisation. The process is also not combined, therefore it is not regarded as strategic.</p>
<p>Type of communication utilised in order to ensure efficient communication with the media</p>	<p>The process does not recognise the importance of interaction. It predominantly focuses on evaluating the severity of the crisis and on evaluating the options that the organisation has available to address the issue timeously.</p> <p>Therefore, this process is regarded as a linear, one-way process, which will not suffice to build relationships with the media. The media reporting can therefore be expected to be negative.</p>
<p>Crisis theory most applicable</p>	<p>A theory that is predominantly <i>reactive</i> is required to guide this process. Therefore, Coombs's SCC theory or Benoit's image restoration theory will be most suited. The SCC theory does give the necessary credit to the value of communication in crisis situations (which this process does not), and it is predominantly concerned with the <i>response</i> element in order to protect the reputation of the organisation.</p> <p>The image restoration theory places great emphasis on the importance of reactive crisis strategies in order to repair a damaged image.</p>
<p>Hale et al's spiral crisis response communication process (Hale et al 2005:119-121)</p>	
<p>Steps</p>	<p>This cyclical process has the following distinctive steps that follows on one another:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Triggering event It is argued that a crisis response communication spiral is stimulated upon the occurrence of a triggering event. The organisation is now experiencing a crisis and preparing to deliver a crisis response. 2. Spiral observation During this phase, the goal of the initial observation is to determine whether the issue is indeed a crisis. Successive repetitions of this phase focuses on obtaining a better understanding of previous responses. 3. Spiral interpretation If the above interpretations result into contradictory evaluations, the spiral would be reversed in order to obtain supplementary information. Should it not be possible to make a decision due to uncertainty or missing/contradicting information, the interpretation step will be reactivated. Each time this step is employed, new information is linked with existing knowledge in order to create a better understanding of the crisis. 4. Spiral choice During this phase, information is analysed against the situational context in which the appropriate decision that should be taken becomes evident. Once a

	<p>solution for implementation has been identified, successive iterations throughout the communication spiral will be used to predict the impact of the unfolding events. In the interim, the successive choice steps will make the necessary adjustments.</p> <p>5. Spiral dissemination The dissemination of the crisis and the responses from the organisation are continuously communicated to crisis response actors (parties that are involved in crisis response) and other internal and external organisational stakeholders. The purpose thereof is to minimise the direct damages of the crisis and to prevent the crisis to evolve further.</p>
Key thrusts	<p>Hale et al (2005:119-121) revised the linear crisis response communication process to the spiral crisis response communication process as the linear process failed to address the difficulties of the communication process. It has been identified that a cycle of chronological communication activities occurs repeatedly throughout the crisis response phase, which makes the linear process insufficient.</p> <p>This process aims to reflect the order that should be taken to structure the communication response during a crisis and the necessary adjustments that have to be made to enable an organisation to adapt to the fluid crisis environment.</p>
Process categorisation (proactive/reactive/post-evaluative or all) and the contribution towards strategic crisis management	<p>This process is predominantly <i>reactive</i> as all the phases are focused on preparing the crisis response.</p> <p>As the process is only regarded as reactive, it is not considered to be strategic.</p>
Type of communication utilised in order to ensure efficient communication with the media	<p>This process utilises one-way communication as it is focused on developing a crisis response without taking feedback from stakeholders into consideration. This will most probably lead to unfavourable media reporting.</p>
Crisis theory most applicable	<p>Due to the cyclical nature of this process, the chaos theory is the most applicable, as both portray the crisis situation as a cyclical process that evolves in intensity.</p>
MacLiam's conceptual process for organisational strategies of crisis communication with the media (MacLiam 2006:199-230)	
Steps	<p>This process is divided into three main sections which collectively forms the crisis response process for crisis communication with the media. It should be noted that only the predominant ideas of this process is discussed below in order to support the process explanation:</p> <p>1. The foundation of the process This section represents the elements that are necessary to instil effective crisis communication with the media, which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A multi-disciplinary crisis communication team with access to information and input into managerial decisions; • Executive stress management: stress has to be managed in order to make level-headed communication decisions. Executives have to understand that one cannot always win in terms of what is reported in the media; • Customer-friendly approach during a crisis: the organisation must constantly be aware of its demeanour towards the media and the general public as public perceptions play a vital role in the successful management of a crisis;

- Proactive crisis response and accessibility: as argued before, an organisation must instil immediate, open and honest communication practices in order to build the necessary trust and credibility with all stakeholders;
- Consistent messages: an organisation must speak out of one mouth; and
- Flexible crisis strategy and continuous environmental scanning (as stated before, crises are fluid which necessitates an adaptable organisational structure).

2. The analysis of the crisis situation

This section is focused on analysing the crisis occurrence, which will assist an organisation in formulating a crisis response. It is argued that an organisation that conducts crisis management proactively is more prepared to deliver an effective crisis response when disaster strikes. The key elements that have to be taken into consideration during the situational analysis (based on Coombs's SCC theory), which collectively forms the crisis response, are:

- The context: public perceptions about an organisation's historic performances as well as the industry in which such an organisation operates have to be evaluated;
- The severity of the damage: the impact that the crisis had on the victims has to be determined; and
- Whether the organisation is perceived as being responsible for the crisis: it is argued that the media will be more critical towards an organisation when the organisation could have prevented the crisis.

3. Content of communications to the media

This section provides various options for the content of the communications to the media. There are two main response categories, namely, *innocent* (when an organisation is innocent) and *guilty* (when a crisis was an organisation's fault).

3.1 Innocent tactics

The aim of these tactics is to convince the media and public that there is no crisis. This is also an ideal opportunity to obtain positive media coverage for an organisation. The following innocent tactics exist (each tactic has various response options, which will not be explained for the purpose of this discussion, as the focus is just to obtain clarification on the broad strategies to support the process explanation):

- Non-existent strategies (strategies aimed at eliminating the crisis);
- Suffering/victim strategies (strategies focused on stimulating public sympathy); and
- Integration strategies (strategies aimed at obtaining public approval).

3.2 Guilty tactics

The objective of these tactics is to ensure that the media views the crisis in a less negative light or to perceive the organisation as more positive based on the manner in which the organisation controlled the crisis. The following guilty tactics exist. It should also be noted that various response options also exist under each tactic, but it will not be explained for the purpose of this discussions as clarified above:

- Distance strategies (an organisation acknowledges the crisis, but try to

	<p>weaken the connection between the crisis and the organisation);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justification strategies (an organisation aims to minimise damage through clarification); • Integration strategies (an organisation is focused on improving public perception of the organisation through positive attribute association); and • Mortification strategies (these strategies aim to stimulate the public's forgiveness for the crisis).
Key thrusts	Through the proposition of crisis response strategies, this process portrays crisis communication as a predominant reactive function. Response strategies are proposed for when an organisation is either perceived as being guilty or innocent. Although the process does recognise the need for proactive crisis management, post-evaluation is absent.
Process categorisation (proactive/reactive/post-evaluative or all) and the contribution towards strategic crisis management	This process is regarded as a <i>reactive</i> process. Although the aim of the process is to provide various crisis communication response strategies, the process fails to recognise that crisis communication is a combined process that should be built on the proactive, reactive and post-evaluative phases of crisis management (reciprocal relationship). Effective communication with the media cannot be instilled without prior sustainable relationships and continuous follow-up after a crisis. However, the process does empower the communication function as strategic as it is proposed that the crisis communication team must have access to top management. Due to the predominant reactive nature of this process, it is not regarded as strategic.
Type of communication utilised in order to ensure efficient communication with the media	Although the process provides the potential to facilitate two-way communication, it appears that all response options are focused on communicating the organisation's perspective. It is therefore characterised as one-way communication as the organisation forces stakeholders to believe what the organisation wants them to believe. With the absence of two-way communication, sustainable stakeholder relationships cannot be formulated with the media.
Crisis theory most applicable	A predominant reactive theory is required for this process. MacLiam used the SCC theory as the foundation for this process. Alternatively, Benoit's image restoration theory could also be integrated with this process, as reactive strategies are proposed in order to restore a tarnished image.
C) CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION PROCESSES WHICH DISPLAYS ALL THE STAGES OF THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT PROCESS	
Mitroff's stage process (Mitroff 1988:18-20; Elsubbaugh et al 2004:113; Fearn-Banks 2007:10)	
Steps	<p>This process holds the following phases:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Signal detection It is argued that prior to a crisis actually occurring, it sends out early warning signals. Crisis managers should pay attention to these signals as crises often occur when these signals are ignored. Furthermore, it is argued that reactive organisations are likely to ignore these signals, while integrative organisations are more proactive with a more balanced approach to crisis management. 2. Preparation/prevention Preparation or preventative measures assist organisations to detect any areas of weakness. The crisis management team has to address these weaknesses. 3. Containment/damage limitation It is vital that an organisation has damage limitation measures in place, as these measures will prevent the damage to spread to other areas of the

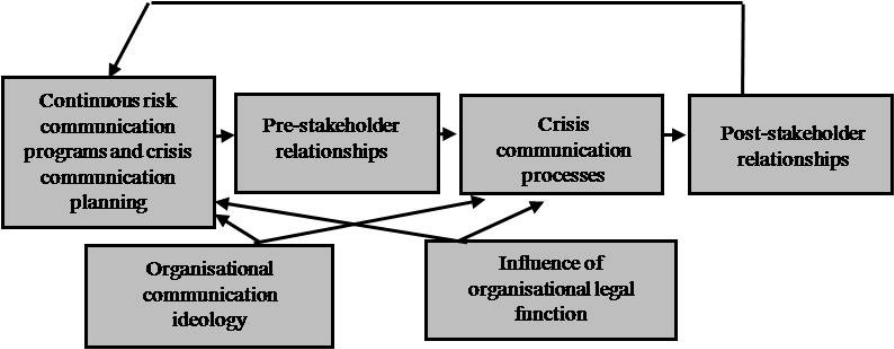
	<p>organisation.</p> <p>4. Recovery Both short-term and long-term recovery measures have to be in place prior to a crisis occurrence, as it is difficult to develop recovery measures in the midst of a crisis.</p> <p>5. Learning This step is a vital element of post-evaluative crisis management. Lessons learned from a crisis could be applied as a proactive measure, therefore resulting in crisis management being a cyclical approach.</p>
Key thrusts	<p>This process recognises the importance of a proactive, reactive and post-crisis management. There are definite proactive, reactive and post-evaluative actions in this process which therefore resembles a strategic management process. Based on this process, Mitroff highlights the following about crisis management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis management is generic: Although different crises appear, they all share a similar pattern which thus necessitates a set crisis management plan as stipulated above. • Crisis management is an interdisciplinary field: Although a crisis affects a certain area of an organisation, it can easily be spread to other organisational areas. In order to manage a crisis effectively, the compound interaction between departments have to be studied. • Crises have numerous causes and conditions: There is not a certain set of conditions that is likely to cause a crisis. • Crisis management principles resemble those principles that direct <i>strategic planning</i>. <p>This point highlights an important element of this study. One has to think about crises as you think about other business practices, for example, to monitor early warning systems is similar to monitoring competitor movements.</p>
Process categorisation (proactive/reactive/post-evaluative or all) and the contribution towards strategic crisis management	<p>This process displays all three stages. Although the steps could have been more specifically categorised as proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages, this process resembles characteristics of a strategic management process.</p>
Type of communication utilised in order to ensure efficient communication with the media	<p>Disappointingly, this process does not recognise the importance of communication – it will thus be regarded as a one-way communication process with the absence of media relationships. This process had the potential to represent a strategic crisis management, but without recognising communication as an integrative element in the crisis management process, it lacks an important aspect of strategy.</p>
Crisis theory most applicable	<p>As this process is not focused on crisis communication, theories that would have been applicable to the combined nature of this process cannot be applied. Therefore, the chaos theory is regarded as most applicable, solely because it resembles the phases of a crisis as stipulated in this process.</p>

Horsley and Barker's synthesis process of crisis management (Horsley & Barker 2002:415-418; Hale et al 2005:115)	
Steps	<p>This process is a plan that combines processes and communication activities that can be utilised in order to effectively prepare for and control crisis communication occurrences. The process holds the following <i>interconnected</i> stages:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ongoing public relations efforts The most effective crisis communication plans happen prior to a crisis: image building and sustainable media relationships are applied and developed during 'good' times, thus ensuring that communication systems are in place during times of emergency. Sustainable relationships with the media ensure favourable and fair reporting during crises and maintain credibility among the public. 2. Identification of and preparation for potential crises It is impossible to prepare for all plans, but, as mentioned in Mitroff's process, generic crisis management plans can be developed. 3. Internal training and rehearsal It is vital that the crisis plan must be rehearsed (through crisis simulation) in order to ensure that all parties are aware of their responsibilities. 4. The crisis event Prompt communication must be delivered after the crisis occurrence. The media must be utilised to disperse information as a key element to preserve good public relations. 5. Evaluation and revision of crisis events It is vital that organisational leaders have to indicate that an organisation has completely recovered from the crisis, what measures will be implemented to avoid such an occurrence in future, and to show that the organisation is prepared for crises in the future. Further negative perceptions could be erased through follow-up stories in the media.
Key thrusts	A key principle that underlines this process is that an organisation's level of crisis preparedness and sustainable media relationships play an integral role in rebuilding public trust and confidence in the organisation. An important element of this process, which is also applicable to this study, proposes that crisis communication plans are built on the internal and external organisational environment where crises take place.
Process categorisation (proactive/reactive/post-evaluative or all) and the contribution towards strategic crisis management	<p>Unlike Mitroff's process, this process recognises the importance of crisis communication and having sustainable relationships with the media and other stakeholders prior to the crisis event.</p> <p>As the process also places high regard on crisis communication as an approach that has proactive, reactive and post-evaluative stages, it is regarded as a process that has the potential to be strategic. The importance of communicators' involvement on management level still has to be emphasised to a greater extent.</p>
Type of communication utilised in order to ensure	This process places high regard on the importance of crisis communication. As the process proposes that relationships should be cultivated with

efficient communication with the media	stakeholders (especially the media), it is argued that this process utilises two-way communication. However, the importance of <i>IC</i> could have been emphasised to a greater extent. Integrative crisis communication (ICC) is also absent.
Crisis theory most applicable	Theories that place high regard on two-way communication and stakeholder relationship-building could underlie this process. Therefore, the stakeholder and excellence theories could be applied.
Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt's integrated four-step symmetrical process for crisis communication management (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt 1996:89-101)	
Steps	<p>This process has the following steps:</p> <p>1. Issues management Issues management enables an organisation to search for issues that might harm the organisation. This step implies that an organisation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Conducts environmental scanning; b) Collects data on issues that might cause trouble; and c) Develops a crisis communication strategy. <p>It is argued that issues management assists an organisation to avoid step 3 (the crisis).</p> <p>2. Planning/prevention During this step, environmental scanning is integrated with the issues management step. Issues management focused on identifying issues of concern and to prevent further development of these issues. During this step, contingency plans have to be formulated to further prevent these issues to develop in intensity. It is argued that planning is the grounding of crisis management. This step involves the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proactive policy is attached to the issue; • The organisation has to re-evaluate its connection with the affected stakeholders; • Contingency plans must be prepared; • The relevant crisis management members must be assigned; • Identify a spokesperson to deal with the media; • Identify a crisis control centre; • Inform and educate internal stakeholders about the crisis; and • Formulating the message and media outlets that will be utilised upon the implementation of the crisis communication plan. <p>As stipulated by the situational theory of publics, an organisation must ensure that the plans display knowledge of public attitudes. Should this stage be addresses successfully, a full blown crisis can be avoided.</p> <p>3. Crisis At this point it is argued that all proactive plans did not suffice. During this step an organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designates definite crisis management team members as stipulated in the proactive stage; • Appoints the spokesperson; • Improves the crisis plan and integrate new information; • Develops mediums of communication; • Communicates to stakeholders the action plans and prevent negative

	<p>publicity;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targets messages to the appropriate stakeholders; • Provides the media with prompt feedback in order to avoid rumours; and • Focuses on conducting the organisation's every-day tasks, despite the crisis. <p>4. Post-crisis Crisis communication must still be conducted during this stage in order to address further media and other stakeholder queries. At the post-crisis stage an organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pays attention to the stakeholders and focuses on resolving the issue completely; • Monitors the intensity of the issue, as it might go back to the crisis stage; • Keeps the media updated on action plans; • Evaluates the effectiveness of the crisis plan; • Incorporates the feedback into the crisis plan; and • Develops sustainable symmetrical communication programs in order to reduce damage caused by the crisis.
Key thrusts	This process is a threefold integration of the situational theory of publics, two-way symmetrical communication and issues management. This process is also cyclical as it is argued that the resolution of one crisis often leads to the beginning of another.
Process categorisation (proactive/reactive/post-evaluative or all) and the contribution towards strategic crisis management	This process displayed all stages and is thus regarded as strategic. The process places high emphasis on crisis communication. However, the process does not directly contribute to empower communication as a strategic function (by stating that the crisis communication team should have access to top management), but through continuously emphasising the importance of communication in all three stages, it does give credit to the value of communication. The reciprocal relationship between crisis communication and crisis management is evident in this process.
Type of communication utilised in order to ensure efficient communication with the media	Two-way communication is employed throughout this process, therefore the communication is also regarded as a combined process (a long-term process; not only a reactive effort). However, the process does not state that two-way communication should be utilised to develop relationships with the media.
Crisis theory most applicable	The situational theory of publics and the stakeholder theory are applicable to this process as it proposes the identification of the specific stakeholders that are affected by the crisis. However, excellence theory would be more appropriate as it not only emphasises the importance of stakeholder relationships and identification, but it also supports the utilisation of two-way symmetrical communication (which is a key element of the process) to build these relationships.
Preble's integrated crisis strategic management process (Preble 1997:782-786)	
Steps	<p>The following steps are evident in this process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing the mission statement and conducting a SWOT analysis: This process begins with developing a mission statement and identifying an organisation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. 2. Conducting a crisis audit: Instead of just focusing solely on the positive aspects of an organisation as revealed in the previous step, such an organisation's susceptibility towards potential crises must also be analysed. All elements of an organisation should

	<p>be examined for possible defects and ‘worst-case scenarios’ have to be formulated. The crisis audit will therefore expose low probability, high impact threatening events, as well as internal weaknesses.</p> <p>3. Develop strategies that take advantage of an organisation’s internal strengths, minimise weaknesses, defend against threats, and exploit opportunities:</p> <p>Additional crisis prevention techniques have to be implemented with the strategy formulation. It is argued that integrating crisis management with strategy formulation will result in a higher competitor advantage for an organisation.</p> <p>4. Implementation of strategies: Strategy implementation starts with stipulating an organisation’s policies and annual objectives. This step also implies the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulation of detailed crisis plans A detailed crisis plan should be put in writing. It should stipulate everyone’s responsibilities as well as the anticipated procedures. • Development of crisis teams The crisis management team should include a group of managers who have crisis management skills. The group should also include specialists in various fields who will be able to address diverse crises. It is vital to note that this team must have the support of the CEO. • Crisis simulation This will allow an organisation to control uncertainty more successfully. • Development of a crisis communication strategy It is argued that communicating to the public through the media is considered a key element to either contribute to the success or failure of the crisis. Public trust has to be created through <i>open communication</i>. <p>At this stage it is vital to obtain formal approval of the crisis management and communication plan.</p> <p>5. Evaluation: Continuous evaluation has to be conducted in order to ensure that the strategy does meet the articulated objectives.</p>
Key thrusts	This process aimed to propose a strategy for integrating crisis management into the strategic management process. It therefore did not aim to make crisis management more strategic. This process does recognise the importance of top management’s support for crisis management procedures.
Process categorisation (proactive/reactive/post-evaluative or all) and the contribution towards strategic crisis management	This process possesses elements of proactivity, reactivity and post-evaluative actions. This process recognises the importance of crisis management on top management level. Although the process is regarded as strategic, it does lack reactive crisis plans (for when disaster strikes). The implementation of this process in crisis situations is therefore questionable as the crisis plans are not detailed enough.
Type of communication utilised in order to ensure efficient communication with the media	This process does recognise that open communication should be utilised. However, the process does not stipulate the integrated usage of communication or the utilisation of two-way communication to build sustainable relationships. Thus, effective media relationships will be absent, which might be problematic during a crisis.

Crisis theory most applicable	A crisis theory that strongly supports strategic literature is required. It is therefore argued that the stakeholder theory would be most applicable, not for its focus on developing relationships with stakeholders, but because it is a theory developed for strategic management.
Marra's process for crisis public relations (Marra 1992:36-67)	
Steps	<p>A graphic representation of this process's steps are provided in order to support the discussion below:</p> <p><i>Figure C: Marra's process for crisis public relations*</i></p>  <pre> graph LR A[Continuous risk communication programs and crisis communication planning] --> B[Pre-stakeholder relationships] B --> C[Crisis communication processes] C --> D[Post-stakeholder relationships] D --> A E[Organisational communication ideology] --> A E --> B E --> C E --> D F[Influence of organisational legal function] --> A F --> B F --> C F --> D </pre> <p>* Adapted from Marra (1992:37).</p>
Key thrusts	<p>This process is similar to Horsley and Barker's process. The core element of this process is the <i>relationships</i> that an organisation builds with its stakeholders. This process also supports the key elements of the excellence theory. It therefore supports this study's argument that sustainable relationships prior to a crisis occurrence are vital in order to successfully resolve a crisis.</p> <p>Another critical aspect of this process is the utilisation of <i>two-way symmetrical communication</i>, in order to build these relationships. It also supports the utilisation of risk communication, as explained earlier. <i>Risk communication</i> enables an organisation to build vital relationships and in a sense influences how well an organisation is prepared for the emergence of a crisis. Furthermore, this process proposes that organisations that implement risk communication as a continuous activity, together with the formulation of proactive <i>crisis communication</i> plans (prior to a crisis), will have stronger relationships with stakeholders which will result in less damage for the organisation during a crisis.</p> <p>Marra argues that an organisation's <i>communication ideology</i> (culture) influences the proactive and reactive stages of a crisis. An organisational culture will determine whether an organisation is <i>crisis prone</i> or <i>crisis avoiding</i>. Thus, it is argued that organisations with communication ideologies that support preparatory crisis management could contribute towards an organisation experiencing less damage during a crisis.</p> <p>The strength of an organisation's <i>legal function</i> will also influence the proactive and reactive crisis management activities of an organisation. Thus, a powerful legal department that supports crisis management practices is therefore ideal in order to successfully plan and manage a crisis.</p>

	This process places high regard on sustainable stakeholder relationships and two-way communication. Crisis communication is also regarded as a continuous element.
Process categorisation (proactive/reactive/post-evaluative or all) and the contribution towards strategic crisis management	This process brilliantly portrays a key argument of this study – prior stakeholder relationships and continuous two-way communication will assist an organisation in managing a crisis more effectively. However, the reciprocal relationship between crisis communication and crisis management is absent, as this process is only focused on crisis communication. It therefore empowers communication as a strategic function through its proactive, reactive and post evaluative portrayal of crisis communication.
Type of communication utilised in order to ensure efficient communication with the media	Two-way symmetrical communication aimed at facilitating sustainable stakeholder relationships is utilised. It can therefore be argued that favourable media reporting will be more likely during a crisis.
Crisis theory most applicable	As this process places high emphasis on the role of communication and sustainable stakeholder relationships prior to a crisis, the excellence theory, which encapsulates these aspects, is the most applicable to this process.

ADDENDUM C: One-on-one interview questionnaire: strategic crisis communication and stakeholder engagement

1) General introductory questions			
Category	Questions		
1.1) Strategy	a) Define strategy and strategic management. b) What are the elements of a strategic management process?		
1.2) The importance of communication in the organisation	c) What is the function of communication in the organisation? d) Does communication fulfil an important role in the strategic management of the organisation? e) What elements are necessary for a strategic communication process? f) Should communication be a separate function from marketing? g) How important is an IC department? h) Should the communication manager have a place in the organisation's dominant coalition? i) Is two-way symmetrical communication preferred above one-way communication procedures?		
1.3) Organisational stakeholders	j) Is it necessary to build sustainable stakeholder relationships, and if so, how is it established? k) Is it necessary to keep both internal and external stakeholders abreast of the latest developments in a crisis? l) Should all the facts of a crisis firstly be communicated to internal stakeholders?		
1.4) The <i>reciprocal relationship</i> between crisis communication and crisis management	m) Define the difference between crisis management and crisis communication. n) Do you regard crisis communication as an important element of crisis management?		
1.5) The crisis communication process	o) Is the crisis communication process regarded as a continuous process and not just as a reactive effort when disaster strikes? p) Explain the importance of crisis communication. q) What is the most important part of the crisis communication process? r) What functions does communication fulfil before a crisis? s) What functions does communication fulfil during a crisis? t) What functions does communication fulfil after a crisis?		
1.6) Operating in the financial industry and the involvement of the media in crisis situations	u) Is the financial industry more vulnerable towards crises in comparison to other industries, and, subsequently, more receptive towards media reporting? v) How important is it to respond to media queries? w) Is the media regarded as forming public opinion? x) How important is it to build a relationship with the media and how is this relationship maintained?		
Element necessary for strategic crisis communication	Proactive crisis communication	Reactive crisis communication	Post-evaluative crisis communication
2) Excellence theory element questions			
2.1) The strategic management of the crisis	a) What type of research is necessary as a proactive measure for crisis	a) What is the role of crisis communication research during the	a) Could crisis communication research, after a crisis, assist the organisation to

communication program: • Communication research • Environmental scanning	communication? b) What are the benefits of environmental scanning? c) Could environmental scanning assist the organisation in avoiding serious crises?	crisis phase? b) Does environmental scanning assist the organisation to better respond to a crisis, should the organisation be unable to resolve the issue before it evolved into a reputational threatening crisis?	better prepare for future occurrences? b) How could post-evaluative crisis communication research contribute towards improving the environmental scanning procedure?
2.2) Access to senior management	d) Why is it important to have access to senior management when preparing crisis communication plans?	c) What are the benefits of having access to senior management upon the occurrence of a crisis?	c) Upon the resolution of a crisis, why is it important to have senior management support?
2.3) Two-way symmetrical communication	e) Explain the benefits of two-way communication with stakeholders prior to a crisis.	d) Could two-way communication assist the organisation in resolving the crisis faster? e) Does a two-way communication approach assist the organisation in maintaining its credibility during a crisis?	d) How does practicing two-way communication assist the organisation to better prepare for future occurrences? e) Will two-way communication contribute towards stronger stakeholder relationships and organisational credibility when the organisation reacts on the feedback obtained from stakeholders about a crisis?
2.4) Participative organisational culture	f) Does a participative organisational structure contribute towards identifying issues that might cause a crisis through the sharing of information?	f) Could a participative organisational culture assist the organisation to better respond to a crisis?	f) Could the trauma and damage to the organisation after a crisis be less when employing a participative organisational structure?
2.5) Symmetrical internal communications	g) Could sharing knowledge and cooperation among employees assist the organisation in detecting issues of concern?	g) Could knowledge-sharing among employees contribute towards a faster crisis response and resolution?	g) Could knowledge sharing among employees assist the organisation to better detect the cause of a crisis and how such occurrences can be identified and avoided in future?
2.6) Organic organisational structure	h) Is an open-door relationship between crisis communicators and top management necessary in order to plan for a possible crisis?	h) What is the importance of an open-door relationship between the crisis communicators, employees and top management to successfully respond to a crisis?	h) Is an open-door policy between crisis communicators and top management the dominant factor that will ensure that top management accepts the necessary precautions (as suggested by crisis communicators) to avoid future crises?
2.7) Recognition that the organisation operates in a volatile environment	i) Does the recognition that the organisation operates in a volatile environment that brings about change	i) Does recognising that the organisation operates in a volatile environment result in better crisis	i) Does recognising that the organisation operates in a volatile environment create better feedback to contribute towards better

	and uncertainty, place a higher emphasis on proactive crisis communication plans? j) If the organisation accepts the volatility of the external environment, does it result in the organisation being more prepared for a crisis occurrence? k) Does a volatile environment result in a stronger early warning system?	management?	crisis preparation procedures?
3) IC element questions			
3.1) Sustainable stakeholder relationship-building	l) How is sustainable relationships built with stakeholders? m) What is the role of two-way communication in this process? n) Is it important to build stakeholder relationships with stakeholders prior to a crisis? o) How important is specifically media relationships prior to a crisis?	j) Will sustainable stakeholder relationships result in better crisis management? k) What is the role of two-way communication when responding to a crisis? l) Is it easier to respond to media queries when having relationships with them? m) Does solid media relationships result in more favourable media reporting?	j) Does having relationships with stakeholders provide more valuable feedback in order to provide opportunities to learn? k) Does the organisation's reputation suffer less damage having solid stakeholder relationships?
3.2) Stakeholder focused	p) How can acting in the best interests of stakeholders and providing them with an opportunity to interact with the organisation better prepare the organisation for a crisis?	n) Could a crisis be more successfully managed by incorporating stakeholder input in the crisis response?	l) Could a similar crisis occurrence be avoided when acting on the feedback that is obtained from stakeholders after a crisis?
3.3) Purposeful interactivity	q) By listening to and learning from stakeholders, could proactive crisis communication and planning assist the organisation to avoid the emergence of a full blown crisis?	o) Could a crisis be more successfully managed by listening and learning from stakeholders?	m) Could stakeholder interactivity assist the organisation in avoiding similar occurrences in future?
3.4) Organisational mission marketing	r) How should the mission of the organisation as a whole be incorporated with crisis communication planning?	p) Should the mission of the organisation be evident in the crisis communication response? q) If this is not possible (the	n) Is it important to evaluate whether the manner in which the crisis was handled, contributed towards marketing the mission of the organisation?

		response contradicts the organisational mission), how is this justified?	
3.5) Cross-functional departmental expertise integration	s) Is it important to have employees with diverse capabilities on the crisis team? t) Who should be on the crisis team and is it important to establish this team prior to a crisis?	r) When disaster strikes, what are the responsibilities of everyone on the crisis team? s) Who should be the organisation spokesperson (a person of expertise in the specific crisis at hand or the communication specialist)?	o) By having diverse opinions about the causes of the crisis, could this result in better feedback in order to better avoid future occurrences?
3.6) Combination of internal and external communication	u) When preparing for a crisis, is it important to ensure that crisis communication plans are aligned with internal communication?	t) Should the crisis response firstly be communicated to internal stakeholders? u) Should the crisis response be aligned with internal crisis communication?	p) Is it important to determine whether the crisis response was in line with internal communication objectives and should measures be implemented to ensure this alignment in future? If so, why?
4) Closing questions			
Category		Questions	
4.1) IC		a) Could IC empower communication to a strategic function?	
4.2) Crisis communication		b) What elements contribute towards a successful crisis communication plan? c) What elements contribute towards the failure of successful crisis communication implementation?	

ADDENDUM D: Focus group questionnaire: strategic crisis communication with the media

Introduction

Literature on crisis communication and crisis management has indicated that crisis communication models are not effective because they are not *strategic*. This can either be ascribed to the viewpoint that communication as a discipline is not regarded as a strategic function or that top management does not regard crisis communication and crisis management as a necessity. Besides the core focus of evaluating *strategic crisis communication*, this research also has two other secondary focus areas, namely the *financial industry* and the *media* as stakeholder group, as it seems that the financial industry is a sensitive industry that is more vulnerable to crises and subsequently more receptive towards media reporting. Based on this background, the following research problem could be formulated:

To explore whether existing crisis communication models contribute towards the strategic management of a crisis through an IC approach in order to ensure that crisis communication with the media, employed by a South African financial services provider, is strategically and efficiently managed.

Literature further indicated that a strategic management process should have planning, implementation and evaluation phases. It was therefore argued that in order to instil a strategic crisis communication process it has to be proactive, reactive and post-evaluative. However, these phases in isolation cannot ensure a fully-fledged strategic process and it was discovered that elements of IC and the excellence theory (which will be defined in the questionnaire) also have to be applied.

The questions in the questionnaire will therefore be formulated against this background.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire is divided into four categories, namely, strategic communication; stakeholder engagement and two-way communication; crisis communication with the media; and IC and the excellence theory. Preceding each category, a short explanation of the respective category is provided.

A. Strategic communication

Strategic communication refers to the preparation and implementation of communication policies in line with the organisational strategy to depict all elements of an organisation in a logical manner. This is done in order to instil the necessary changes in the stakeholders with which the organisation aims to build and preserve relationships. These stakeholder relationships are built and preserved through two-way communication. Strategic communication also implies scanning the environment for new developments and the expectation of the possible consequences that these developments might have on the communication policy.

1.	How would you define strategy?
2.	How would you describe strategic communication?
3.	What elements would you regard as a necessity for a strategic communication process (for example, two-way communication; stakeholder relationships; early detection of issues; access to senior management; understanding of organisational happenings; research and an alignment of the organisational mission)? What is the most important element?
4.	Should the communication manager be part of the top management of the organisation? Motivate your answer.
5.	What is the most important function(s) that communication contributes on a strategic level (for example, media liaison; stakeholder relationship-building; employee engagement; achieving organisational objectives; achieving the strategy of the organisation as a whole; proactively detecting and resolving issues that could cause a crisis)?

B. Stakeholder engagement and two-way communication	
<i>This section focuses on the role of two-way communication in building stakeholder relationships. It is argued that two-way communication is necessary in order to build sustainable relationships with stakeholders. Two-way symmetrical models of communication balance the interests of an organisation with its publics, are based on research, and uses communication to manage conflict with strategic publics. It is also argued that strategic communication is facilitated through two-way communication. For the purpose of this study, it will be argued that two-way symmetrical communication should be practiced to build sustainable relationships with the media in order to facilitate effective and strategic crisis communication.</i>	
6.	What role does two-way communication play in building sustainable media relationships?
7.	In your opinion, what is the importance of internal stakeholder relationships during a crisis situation? Motivate your answer.
8.	What elements are necessary in order to build good media relationships?
9.	In your opinion, should a good relationship with the media be maintained? Motivate your answer.
10.	What are the benefits of strong media relationships for an organisation experiencing a crisis? a) It will ensure more favourable media reporting for the organisation experiencing the crisis. b) It will eliminate one-sided reporting (reporting without the organisation's input). c) All the facts will be reported even if it places the organisation in a bad light. d) Despite a good relationship, media reporting will depend on the individual journalist's drive for sensation. e) Other.
C. Crisis communication with the media	
<i>As stipulated in the introduction, it is argued that a strategic crisis management process should be proactive, reactive and post-evaluative. There is a reciprocal relationship between crisis communication and crisis management. Although crisis communication is regarded as an element of crisis management, crisis communication should be practiced proactively, reactively and post-evaluatively – it therefore encapsulates the whole crisis management process. Crisis communication is not regarded as a reactive function as is often argued by crisis scholars.</i>	
11.	How do you manage communication with the media during a crisis? Motivate your answer.
12.	How would you describe crisis communication? a) It is a reactive element of the crisis management process. b) It encapsulates the whole crisis management process. c) It is an outcome of the crisis management process. d) It is a separate element from the crisis management process. e) It should be managed strategically. f) Other.
13.	Should crisis communication with the media be practiced proactively, reactively or post-evaluatively, or should a combination (integrated) approach be followed?
14.	In your opinion, what are the benefits of <i>proactive</i> crisis communication with the media? Motivate your answer.
15.	In your opinion, what are the benefits of <i>reactive</i> crisis communication with the media? Motivate your answer.
16.	In your opinion, what are the benefits of <i>post-evaluative</i> crisis communication with the media? Motivate your answer.
17.	What elements are the most important to ensure successful crisis communication with the media?
18.	What elements could mostly be responsible for the failure of successful crisis communication with the media?
D. IC and the excellence theory	
<i>IC is defined as a strategic management process of organisationally controlling or influencing all messages and it encourages purposeful, data-driven dialogue in order to create and nourish long-term profitable relationships with stakeholders. IC is also the harmonisation of internal and external communication. Practically, it thus refers to the integration of all communication functions into one</i>	

department.

The excellence theory is selected for the purpose of this study as it not only supports the strategic management of communication, but also underlines the importance of utilising two-way communication in order to build sustainable relationships with stakeholders. Indirectly, this theory also empowers communication as a strategic function. Communication knowledge, shared expectations and participative organisational culture forms the essence of the excellence theory.

It is argued that a proactive, reactive and post-evaluative crisis communication model should integrate various elements of IC and the excellence theory in order to instil a fully-fledged strategic process. The questions in this section will be based on various characteristics of IC and the excellence theory.

19.	How do you apply the following elements in the strategic management of a crisis communication plan? a) Research (audits, questionnaires, etc.). b) Environmental scanning (similar to a SWOT analysis).
20.	When should top management mostly be involved in a crisis? a) Before the crisis (during the planning stage). b) During the crisis (when the crisis is actually happening). c) After the crisis. d) All of the above.
21.	How can an organic organisational structure (participative, open structure) assist an organisation to better manage a crisis? Motivate your answer.
22.	What elements are required in order to effectively manage changes in the environment leading to a crisis?
23.	Should crisis communication plans be aligned with the organisational strategy in terms of: a) Mission; b) Vision; c) Values; d) Strategic objectives; e) Communication objectives; f) Crisis management strategy/risk management strategy; and g) Other.
24.	Is diverse expertise required in a crisis team?
25.	Within a crisis context, internal communication plans should: a) Be separated from external communication plans. b) Be combined with external communication plans. c) Be aligned with the communication processes in the organisation (such as marketing, advertising, etc.). d) Other.

ADDENDUM E: Absa’s draft crisis communication plan categorised against the three stages of crisis communication

Core elements of crisis communication plan	Description of element
Actions considered as part of the proactive crisis communication stage	
Identification of reputational risk sources	<p>The plan is specifically developed to combat strategic, credit, market, liquidity, operational, compliance and reputational risks, with a core focus on the latter. Reputational risks have to be <i>proactively</i> managed as it can create negative perceptions of the organisation that could withhold the organisation to build new stakeholder relationships and to preserve current stakeholder relationships. Reputational risks originate from the following sources:</p> <p>Product/services issues, innovation-related issues, workplace-related issues, governance-related issues, citizenship-related issues, leadership-related issues, and performance-related issues.</p>
Identification of crisis communication roles and responsibilities	<p>Each specialised communication function has specific roles during a crisis (which are proactively identified), with the direct involvement of the Executive Director of Marketing and Communications (who serves on the top management of the organisation) and also involves the managers of each function. There is a dominant involvement of management figures in managing crisis communication. The roles of the Head of Media Relations will include: assessment of media needs, content generation, spokesperson identification, media monitoring to determine new media information needs, message alignment with international media, on-site media management, and marketing support for non-mediated stakeholder communication.</p>
Identification of risk categories	<p>Five levels of risk are identified based on the severity of a crisis. The communication functions are responsible for managing a crisis and developing appropriate responses on each level. The higher the severity of the crisis, the higher the management responsibility which varies from executive to departmental manager involvement. The levels include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Code red: catastrophic incident; 2. Code amber: severe incident; 3. Code yellow: serious incident; 4. Code blue: significant incident; and 5. Code green: routine incident.
Crisis prevention: media	<p>This is a predominant media monitoring function that identifies burning issues in the media that could evolve into a reputation threatening crisis.</p>
Identification of channels to disseminate crisis communication	<p>Various communication channels are identified which will be used in the event of a crisis. These channels are developed for employees and customers.</p>
Identify all stakeholders	<p>A list of all of Absa’s internal and external stakeholders with their contact details has to be compiled which should form part of the crisis communication plan. This list has to be updated at least twice a year.</p>

Actions considered as part of the reactive crisis communication stage	
Communication response to relevant risk category	For each of the above mentioned crisis levels an appropriate response is formulated and each party's responsibilities are stipulated. This could also be regarded as a proactive element as the response is largely determined prior to a crisis occurrence.
Crisis management	This step highlights that prompt decision making is required during a crisis in order to ensure rapid communication to all stakeholder groups. The parties that have to approve communication messages prior to the release thereof, according to the various levels of a crisis, are also highlighted.
Media communication	<p>The plan stipulates that the manner in which Absa communicates during a crisis has a permanent impact on its reputation. Absa also takes the viewpoint that public opinion is formulated by the media. It is argued that the Head of Media Relations has to be the key spokesperson during a crisis. However, when Absa experiences a code red crisis, the CEO has to be the spokesperson. Other authorised spokespeople are the Executive Director of Marketing and Communication, the Head of Investor Relations, and Subject Matter Experts as designated by the Head of Media Relations. No other employee may engage with the media.</p> <p>Everything communicated to the media has to be official and statements cannot be based on rumours or speculations. Verifiable details have to be provided as soon as possible utilising the designated communication channels (as identified in the proactive stage). All media queries have to receive responses within 30 minutes after all the relevant facts have been gathered. In the event of a breaking crisis, a holding statement should be released within an hour after the first media query which should stipulate that Absa is aware of the incident and that Absa displays a commitment towards responsible issue management and communication. The head of media relations should be the contact person for further queries. The media has to be monitored for possible news coverage.</p> <p>A media log must also be maintained to record all media interviews. All queries have to be referred to the Head of Media Relations.</p> <p>Depending on the level of a crisis, the Executive Director of Communication and Marketing has to decide whether a media statement has to be released and also send updates throughout the duration of the crisis. The same procedure applies to the implementation of a media conference.</p> <p>Information that cannot be released to the media include: client transactions, employee medical history, home address or contact details of any Absa staff member, and the identity of any Absa staff member involved in a serious incident.</p>
Employee communication	Absa employees are regarded as a priority stakeholder group

	during a crisis. When relevant, employees will be informed of a crisis through utilising established internal communication channels. All communication has to be formulated with the mindset that it could be distributed to external sources.
Communication with other stakeholders	The stakeholder list should be utilised in order to detect which stakeholder groups require communication during a crisis. No written assurances may be provided.
Next of kin and victim communications	The South African Police Service has to notify next of kin in the event of a crisis-related fatality. Absa should protect the identity of dead or injured individuals until the next of kin has been informed.
Actions considered as part of the post-evaluative crisis communication stage	
Standing down the media engagement program after a crisis	The Executive Director of Communication and Marketing, in consultation with the crisis team, will determine when a crisis has been sufficiently resolved and the crisis communication function can stand down.
Evaluation and follow-up	<p>The Executive Director of Communication and Marketing has to meet with the key players of the crisis team to review media coverage, actions taken, lessons learned and problems that have to be avoided in future, instil follow-up measures to improve Absa's crisis communication processes, and the overall success or failure of the crisis communication.</p> <p>The findings of the evaluation have to be included in an after action report which should be distributed to the relevant Absa parties.</p>

ADDENDUM F: Interpretation categories of the one-on-one interviews and focus groups

Category 1: Strategic communication results

Category 1: Strategic communication	
Key responses	<p>a) Absa Group strategy, communication strategy and crisis communication strategy alignment These findings were obtained through analysing Absa’s IC strategy for 2009, which will sketch a background for the findings obtained from the one-on-one interviews and focus groups.</p> <p>Absa Group’s strategy predominantly highlights the purpose, vision, strategic objectives, strategic enablers, performance measures, stakeholders, core differentiators and values. The vision of the Absa Group, <i>to be the best provider of Financial Services in South Africa and selected African markets</i>, has a strong stakeholder focus (which highlights the need for a two-way communication focus). It is clearly stipulated that the achievement of the strategic objectives is enabled through <i>communication</i> support.</p> <p>Absa’s communication strategy is built on an in-depth analysis of global and local forces shaping the financial industry. The communication strategy is also preceded by a stakeholder analysis. The communication strategy’s vision is developed to achieve the vision of the overall Group strategy through enhancing Absa’s reputation through effective communication between all stakeholders. The Absa crisis communication plan specifically fits in the Group’s communication strategy under the key deliverable of communication governance.</p> <p>b) Insights obtained from the data collection methods Communication is represented at top management level through the Executive Director of Marketing and Communication, with functional and departmental communication managers that filter important information from the top to the rest of the department. As stipulated in Absa’s strategic documents, strategy is regarded as the roadmap of how plans are implemented. Strategic communication plans are developed through an alignment with the overall organisational strategy (specifically the CEO’s priorities) and an in-depth evaluation of the external environment. Strategy is also about ensuring that the organisation has the necessary resources to ensure successful implementation.</p> <p>The following are regarded as the fundamental elements of a strategic management process: conversation in order to sketch the bigger picture; SWOT analysis; environmental impact studies; and an in-depth stakeholder analysis to obtain a clear understanding of their wants and needs. All these elements have to be aligned with the overall organisational strategy.</p> <p>Strategy was also defined as opportunity divided by capacity – it is about utilising opportunities in the market that will maximise your return through the available resources. Furthermore, it was said that strategy is a multilateral, dynamic process of determining where the organisation is today and where it wants to be in future. From a crisis perspective, it was said that the involvement of top management will depend on the severity of a crisis (as illustrated by the various levels of a crisis in the draft crisis plan).</p>

	<p>Communication within corporate organisations cannot fulfil a mere support function as in the past – the key focus is on how communication can contribute to the bottom line. It is vital to display communication’s contribution towards the achievement of the organisational strategy. If this alignment is absent, communication will never be regarded as a fundamental building block of organisational strategy or an important strategic function for that matter. The main function of communication within the organisation is <i>employee engagement</i>. This is achieved through shifting the Group’s mindset from top-down, one-way communication to two-way communication practices. Absa places a high regard on employee opinion surveys and other communication channels to instil two-way communication internally. The communication department is regarded as the custodians of the organisation’s reputation. Furthermore, communication fulfils an important enabling and facilitating role. A strategy is unclear until it is unpacked through communication – as every member of the organisation has to understand the organisation’s strategy.</p> <p>Strategic communication is structured communication aimed at achieving specific objectives. Strategic communication is the ability to influence business strategy and therefore to not just mirror business strategy. When communication can be used to identify risks and influence certain business decisions, it moves communication from a technical function to a strategic function. The most important element that communication contributes on a strategic level is to keep the business honest through boundary spanning – communication practitioners assist management to detect what the outcome of their business decisions will be.</p> <p>The communication strategy emphasises the importance of measuring Absa’s success through the Absa Group Reputation Index, Group Communication Scorecard and other communication effectiveness measurement tools.</p>
Relation to theory	<p>a) Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As stipulated by Niemann’s conceptual model for IC, the communication and business objectives of the organisation have to be built on the organisational <i>mission</i>. • Important elements derived from the literature regarding strategy, are that strategy is a guideline that helps to achieve the objectives of the organisation; and it focuses on the interrelationship between the organisation and its environment – the organisation uses strategy to effectively manage change from the outside. • Strategic management is concerned with achieving the mission of the organisation in correspondence with managing the relationship of the organisation with its external environment. A strategic management plan possesses planning, interpretation and evaluation phases. • Strategic management occurs on different levels of the organisation, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) <i>Corporate level</i>: strategy is the responsibility of top management (Absa Group strategy). ii) <i>Business level</i>: different departments in the organisation are responsible for translating the statements made at corporate level into functional strategies for each department (Absa Group communication strategy). iii) <i>Functional level</i>: functional managers develop annual objectives and short-term strategies, which represents key functions in the organisation such as finance and marketing. The functional strategy should be directed in order to support other levels of strategic management (Absa Group communication strategy). iv) <i>Enterprise strategy</i>: focuses on achieving the non-financial-related objectives, such as protecting the organisation’s reputation through crisis management. This strategy has to be stakeholder focused in order to ensure that the

	<p>organisation is regarded as legitimate and socially responsible by society at large (Absa Group crisis communication strategy).</p> <p>v) <i>Operational level</i>: strategies are converted into action.</p> <p>b) Strategic communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is the adhesive that connects the elements of the organisation, allowing interaction among key stakeholders. • The achievement of organisational objectives and total functioning of the organisation are largely determined by its communication. • The functions of communication within the organisation are largely <i>strategic</i>: communication has a stakeholder relationship-building function (through the utilisation of two-way communication) and thus it plays a vital role in achieving organisational objectives and the normal functioning of the organisation to identify changes in the external environment. • Although the degree of communication's importance on the various levels of the organisation vary, corporate communication form a vital part of the total strategic management process. • Key elements of communication that contribute towards strategic management are sustainable stakeholder relationship-building through two-way communication; early detection of issues; a clear understanding of internal organisational happenings in order to effectively communicate to external stakeholders; and the resolution of problems through research. • The <i>mirror function</i> refers to scanning the environment for new developments and the expectation of the possible consequences that these developments might have on the communication policy. • Corporate communication practitioners also fulfil the important function of boundary spanners, which refer to their functions as information gatherers and processors. It also refers to their ability to function on the edge of the organisation, thereby acting as liaisons between the organisation and its stakeholders. The boundary spanning, mirror and window functions are all vital functions contributing to the strategic management process
<p>Subjective interpretations</p>	<p>Absa's communication strategy is in line with the overall Group strategy, with the crisis communication strategy evolving from the communication strategy. It is evident that the various strategies correlate with the levels of strategic management: the overall Group strategy is the responsibility of top management on corporate level; the communication strategy has to be implemented on business and functional levels; and the crisis communication strategy is on the functional level. The communication strategy's vision is also formulated to achieve the overall vision of the organisation, therefore the communication and business objectives of the organisation have been built on the organisation's vision. Both the Group strategy and communication strategy have been formulated against the background of an environmental and stakeholder analysis.</p> <p>The above strategies do not display definite planning, implementation and evaluation stages. However, the various steps of the plan can be categorised as such. Both the communication plan and the crisis communication plan recognised the importance of evaluation and measurement either through reviewing past actions or utilising various measurement tools. Although the importance of measurement is emphasised, a forum to share necessary knowledge to build a learning organisation (to instil a strategic thinking environment) is not proposed. Two-way communication at this level should also be</p>

	<p>applied. As identified in the literature, strategy is regarded as a guideline or roadmap to achieve the objectives of the organisation.</p> <p>It is clear that the structure of Absa allows for communication to be practiced on top management level through the Executive Director of Marketing and Communication that filters the information from top management to other managers within the department. Important issues of concern identified within the communication department can also be raised on top management level through the Executive Director of Marketing and Communication. It was argued that interaction is the core of a strategy as the strategy will be lifeless and not implementable unless it is unpacked through communication.</p> <p>It was evident that the worth of communication in the achievement of the organisational strategy has to be displayed. Should one fail to achieve this alignment, communication will never be regarded as an important strategic function. As a result, all other important derivatives of communication, such as crisis communication, would also not be regarded as strategic. It seems that the place of communication within the organisation also depends upon the organisational ‘mindset’ and structure (often developed by the CEO). Absa has an organisational structure that understands the worth of communication on top management level. Within Absa, strategic communication is not just regarded as mirroring the business strategy, but also to influence business decisions. Thus, the mirror function and boundary spanning role of corporate communication are evident as it will ensure that the organisation is aware of what the outcome of certain business decisions will be.</p> <p>Although two-way communication is practiced internally, communication as an important stakeholder relationship-building function seems to be absent. Two-way communication has to be practiced with all stakeholders in order to build and preserve relationships. Without stakeholders, organisations cannot exist. Therefore, organisations have to instil a stakeholder focus which is achieved through two-way communication that builds sustainable relationships.</p>
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Category 2: Excellence theory results

Category 2: Excellence theory	
General insights	<p>In general, the communication department places a high regard on corporate governance and transparency.</p> <p>Two-way communication plays a significant role on each level of a crisis, but utilising two-way communication to build stakeholder relationships was not recognised.</p>
Proactive crisis communication	
Key responses	<p>A participative internal organisational climate is created through two-way communication channels and various employee surveys. Absa follows a centralised model in which hierarchal structures are broken down.</p> <p>Absa further utilises research and environmental scanning as a basis for their crisis communication plans. Issues management and identification of stakeholder concerns are also utilised as important research elements which are used as a proactive crisis communication measure. Knowing that the organisation operates in a volatile industry places higher emphasis on environmental scanning, and, subsequently, proactive crisis management.</p>

	<p>Top management input during the compilation of a crisis communication plan not only assists the communication team to ensure faster implementation but also provides valuable input in the process itself. Issues will result into crises if communication specialists do not have access to senior management.</p>
Relation to theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A <i>participative</i> rather than an authoritarian organisation culture should be employed. Participative cultures pull employees together to collectively accomplish the mission of the organisation. These organisations also favour innovation and are adaptive to new ideas. • The traditional mechanistic view of the organisation is replaced with a less bureaucratic, organic structure. Employees have easy access to top management and welcomes input from staff. • Communication programs should be managed strategically, thus it should be based on <i>research and environmental scanning</i>. • A direct reporting relationship will ensure faster acceptance and implementation of the crisis management and communication plan as well as management's acceptance of the importance of crisis management as a continuous process. • The volatile environment brings about change and uncertainty which is also characteristic of an organisational crisis.
Subjective interpretations	<p>Internal two-way communication could lead to sharing knowledge and cooperation among employees in order to instil a symmetrical internal communication environment. This could also assist the organisation to proactively identify issues of concern before they evolve into a crisis. Absa also places high regard on environmental scanning to detect burning issues.</p> <p>A centralised model (organic organisational structure) could assist the communication specialists to have easier access to top management which will assist them with planning for a crisis occurrence.</p>
	Reactive crisis communication
Key responses	<p>Transparency and honesty during a crisis are vital. An open, honest relationship with stakeholders also has a risk (which would explain Absa's limited scope two-way communication structure), because everything that is communicated to employees could be distributed in the media. Two-way communication with the media is important, but not always possible due to the diversity of stakeholders that Absa needs to report to. Some information cannot be communicated due to confidentiality levels.</p> <p>A centralised organisational structure will also stimulate interaction among employees which will contribute towards the participative organisational structure.</p> <p>Research conducted proactively will not assist the organisation to better manage a crisis – access to senior management would be more important reactively. This input will assist the organisation to resolve the crisis faster as 'the buck stops' at top management level.</p> <p>Absa's top management always appreciates input from the communication team and tends to listen to them to resolve and manage issues. However, the involvement of top management is determined by the level of severity of the crisis as identified</p>

	<p>in the crisis plan.</p> <p>Two-way communication plays an important role in the ‘rumour mill’ during a crisis – if stakeholders constantly receive updated information, rumours can be effectively managed and even eliminated.</p> <p>The participants in the one-on-one interview and focus group felt that an organic organisational structure is ideal but it would not necessarily assist the organisation to better manage a crisis. It was argued that when planning for a crisis, organisational structure is not a consideration.</p>
<p>Relation to theory</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sound internal organisational climate is necessary in order to effectively communicate to the outside world during a crisis. • A direct reporting relationship with senior management will ensure faster acceptance and implementation of the crisis management and communication plan as well as management’s acceptance of the importance of crisis management as a continuous process. • Listening and learning are characteristics of a participative organisational culture. • Crisis communicators require easy access to top management in order to ensure the effective execution of the crisis management plan, which is facilitated through an organic organisational structure. • Communication programs should be managed strategically, thus it should be based on <i>research and environmental scanning</i>.
<p>Subjective interpretations</p>	<p>As an environment for knowledge sharing is created internally, the organisation will be able to manage a crisis more successfully.</p> <p>Honesty and transparency during a crisis can contribute towards a participative culture in which knowledge is shared among employees.</p> <p>Absa’s direct reporting relationship with senior management during a crisis would ensure a more rapid response during a crisis.</p> <p>Top management that appreciates input from the communication team will be able to more successfully empower communication as a management function and thereby also be able to manage a crisis more effectively as the importance of sufficient crisis communication will be understood and supported.</p> <p>Only sending out updated information during a crisis does not create a two-way communication forum, therefore mediums to gather stakeholder input should be developed.</p> <p>As identified in the communication principles on which the crisis communication plan is built, two-way communication in a crisis has definite boundaries. However, these boundaries have to be managed in order to ensure ethical distribution of information and an overall culture of dialogue.</p>

	<p>It is clear that some of the elements of excellence theory cannot be practiced efficiently on every level of a crisis. For example, research will only be viable on a proactive and a post-evaluative level; it has no relevance on a reactive level.</p> <p>Although not regarded as a necessity for effective crisis communication by Absa, an organic organisational structure is vital in order to facilitate effective crisis communication as issues or crises will be resolved faster through participation and information sharing. Easy access to top management will also be enabled through an organic organisational structure.</p>
	Post-evaluative crisis communication
Key responses	<p>The results obtained from internal opinion surveys are analysed and implemented in order to ensure a better internal organisational climate.</p> <p>Formal research tools are important during the evaluation phase as these will assist the organisation to identify weaknesses. Only important lessons learnt from a crisis will be shared with top management.</p>
Relation to theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A learning organisation creates a strategic thinking environment through <i>knowledge sharing</i>. • Research on past crisis experiences can also assist the organisation to plan for and manage future difficulties.
Subjective interpretations	<p>As the results from internal opinion surveys are analysed it can contribute to a participative organisational structure which can assist the organisation to better manage change and uncertainty brought about by organisational crises.</p> <p>Only sharing the lessons learnt with top management will not create a forum to share knowledge – a forum of discussion has to be created with all the necessary internal organisational stakeholders. If this knowledge sharing culture does not happen on top management level, it will be difficult to institutionalise in the rest of the organisation.</p>

Category 3: IC results

Category 3: IC	
General insights	<p>As IC is <i>stakeholder focused</i>, it was necessary to evaluate Absa's perception on stakeholders, specifically the media. The stakeholder analysis within Absa's strategic documentation specifically reports that the media is becoming more ruthless; more demanding in their drive for answers and information; the modern media represents a group of younger generation journalists that are ruthless in their strive for celebrity status; poor quality journalism; and it is clearly stated that Absa needs a unique approach in order to entice journalists to make Absa a more recognised brand and therefore Absa can no longer rely on sponsorships for positioning.</p> <p>Absa aims to instil an enhanced integrated stakeholder approach, moving away from inconsistent stakeholder engagement. <i>An increased emphasis on stakeholders is thus evident</i>. The modern consumer is much more educated than in the past, therefore it is vital to fully understand what the stakeholders wants and needs are (especially in a sensitive industry such as the financial industry).</p> <p>An IC department can result in a more strategic communication function that establishes sustainability and good corporate citizenship, which is vital for stakeholder relationships. IC also ensures message consistency. It is argued that an IC department will only ensure more organised practices and not necessarily a strategic environment. The success of an IC</p>

	department depends on its people – there has to be a willingness to work together.
	Proactive crisis communication
Key responses	<p>Absa follows an IC structure to ensure that internal and external messages are aligned.</p> <p>Proactive media relationships are vital in order to ensure the media’s support when things go wrong. <i>Sustainable relationships</i> with the media are built through ‘media roundtables’ and forums in which the media has the opportunity to ask questions on financial-related aspects. It is argued that the media appreciates this proactive communication. Relationships between the various business units within Absa are also established with the media through this proactive, personal media contact. Potential problems that could result in crises are proactively addressed in these meetings. Casual meetings are also arranged between the CEO and the media to get to know each other on a personal level.</p> <p>Absa prefers two-way communication in order to obtain input from stakeholders. As indicated in the crisis communication plan, a list of stakeholders is proactively compiled to make the communication during a crisis easier.</p> <p>The crisis communication strategy has to be aligned with the mission of the organisation as everything counts as building blocks of the organisation’s reputation.</p>
Relation to theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is argued that in order to facilitate the strategic management of public relations, and to ensure that public relations contributes to the overall strategic organisational objectives, organisations must implement an <i>IC</i> department for all public relations activities, or develop a method to coordinate the programs of various departments. Internal and external communication has to be harmonised to ensure consistent message formulation. • Proactive crisis communication <i>suggests openness to, and cooperation with, the publics before an issue matures into a crisis</i>. This represents two-way symmetrical communication, an important element of <i>IC</i>, in order to build strategic stakeholder relationships. • A core driver of <i>IC</i> is that customer databases should be built and managed, as personalised communication can only be facilitated through the implementation of a program to build and use databases, as information is the bloodstream of the organisation. • Another driver of <i>IC</i> indicates that the organisation’s mission has to be integrated into all activities.
Subjective interpretations	<p>Input from stakeholders could result in the identification of burning issues that can result in crises.</p> <p>It is evident that Absa places emphasis on proactive media relationships through discussion forums in order to identify issues of concern. These relationships are also built on top management level in a humanistic manner which could also assist Absa during times of crises.</p> <p>Proactive compilation of a stakeholder list can assist the organisation to send out information at a much faster pace, since a constant flow of information is, indeed, the heartbeat of the organisation during a crisis.</p> <p>As indicated in Category 1, Absa’s communication plan and crisis communication plan (to a lesser extent) are aligned with the organisational mission. However, in order to be the best financial services provider, more emphasis has to be placed on</p>

	sustainable relationship-building with stakeholders through two-way communication.
	Reactive crisis communication
Key responses	<p>During times of crises, it is vital to keep both internal and external stakeholders abreast of crisis developments. In the case of Absa, employees are regarded as brand ambassadors. If they receive the facts during a crisis, they can assist the organisation to circulate the facts and to rectify and minimise rumours.</p> <p>Should a crisis occur, it is vital to involve a person that is an expert on the particular crisis, for example, should a crisis be related to a specific fund, the fund manager should work closely with the communication team to manage the crisis successfully. The communication team has to work closely with this expert and continuously update facts. Absa always has a legal representative on the crisis team.</p> <p>The participants in the one-on-one interviews and focus group agreed that internal communication plans have to be aligned with external communication plans (within a crisis context) as this will assist the communication practitioners to better manage a crisis.</p> <p>Media relationships established prior to a crisis could result in constructive or destructive reporting during a crisis – what will be reported is a matter of media and organisational ethics.</p>
Relation to theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expertise within the organisation should be integrated, in which experiences and meaning is shared. • In order to avoid fragmented communication, which can have a negative impact on the organisation's image, internal and external communication messages have to be harmonised. • In order to build and maintain <i>effective</i> media relations, media relations built <i>prior</i> to a crisis situation to facilitate mutual trust will increase the likelihood of favourable media reporting during a crisis.
Subjective interpretations	<p>The combination of internal and external communication messages was supported as it was argued that it will assist an aligned crisis communication response.</p> <p>Media relationships will definitely assist the organisation to better manage a crisis and it provides a sense of control over what will be reported. However, the publication and journalist involved plays a large role on what will be reported during a crisis.</p>
	Post-evaluative crisis communication
Key responses	Evaluation is conducted after a crisis, but communicating about the crisis is not practiced – lessons learned are only shared with top management.
Relation to theory	Feedback and dialogue should be facilitated with all stakeholders in order to ensure a higher level of stakeholder integration into the organisation's planning and operations. Therefore, the norm should be to listen and learn as oppose to tell and sell.
Subjective interpretations	Two-way communication should be used to create purposeful interactivity and to facilitate listening and learning among stakeholders about the crisis. Evaluation will be of little value if the lessons learnt are not discussed and a feedback culture is not instilled.