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Second stage development of the Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) Model in crisis communication: Organizational strategies for crises that require high and low organizational engagements

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Second Stage Development of the Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) Model in Crisis Communication: Emo-Action Language versus Emotional Language for Crises that require High and Low Organizational Engagements

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Abstract

Extending current theories in crisis communication, the authors have developed a more systemic approach to understanding the role of emotions. The Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) model is based on a public-based, emotion-driven perspective where different crises are mapped on two continua, the organization's engagement in the crisis and primary public's coping strategy. This second-stage testing, representing the fourth in the series, found that on top of discovering anxiety as a possible default emotion that publics feel in crises in an earlier study, the default response organizations embroiled in crises involving hostile takeovers, accidents, natural disasters, CEO retirement, rumor, and psychopathic acts, tend to adopt is qualified rhetoric-mix stance that is full of rhetoric while doing little to reassure the publics. Where possible, organizations should move beyond initial posturing to real action, i.e., from a qualified rhetoric-mix stance to action-based stance, peppered with messages that use what we call "emo-action language", language that acknowledges the emotional upheavals the publics experience with promises of concurrent action to alleviate their emotional turmoil. The findings, while still very much exploratory, suggest theoretical rigor in the model, with room for further refinements to generate what Yin (2003) termed "analytic generalization" (p. 33) for the ICM model.

Introduction

How to shape the appropriate strategies in response to a crisis is critical for any given organization and public relations practitioner working in the field of crisis communication. Given that the goals of crisis communication, defined as the "ongoing dialogue between the organization and its publics" prior to, during, and after the crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2002, p. 2) are to restore organizational normalcy, influence public perception, and regain and repair image and reputation, strategies used should be "designed to minimize damage to the image of the organization" (p. 2). Strategies, argued Massey (2001), are "message repertoires that are designed to repair the organization's image by influencing stakeholder perceptions" (p. 155). Ray (1999) argued that strategies establish and enact "control (at least in its appearance) in the

face of high uncertainty" (p. 19). Lukaszweski (1997) argued that the strategic management of message response in crisis communication is a "fundamental communication principle" (p. 8). Designing sound strategic communications and tactics to communicate crisis so as to minimize damage to the image of the organization has been described as "management at its zenith" (Stocker, 1997, p. 203).

While most of these strategies are often characterized as direct responses to the crisis (Cowden & Sellnow, 2002; Fearn-Banks, 2002; Fink, 1986; Harrison, 1999; Massey, 2001; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Seegar & Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer, 2001), Ray (1999) argued that strategies would either, (1) deny the crisis exists; (2) provide "partial, inaccurate, or delayed information"; or (3) maintain an open communication channels with constituents (p. 20).

Current Situation-Based Conceptualization of Crisis Response

Arguably, the two dominant theories on crisis strategies, Benoit's (e.g., 1994; 1995; 1997; 1999; 2004) image repair strategies, and Coombs' (e.g., 1995; 1998) situational crisis communication strategies, are designed to understand what strategies are relevant to use under what circumstances. These often stem from a *situation-based* response to crisis. The image repair theory is appropriate to be used when the situation leads to a loss of face. When face is threatened, face works is used to repair image, argued Benoit & Brinson (1994). This usually occurs when the accused is believed to have committed an offensive act by its salient audience (Benoit, 2004). Face, image, and reputation are extremely important commodities, argued Benoit and Brinson (1994), because, as a society, we pride ourselves on, and value those who enact tolerance, and sensitivity, to the feelings and traditions of others (Brinson & Benoit, 1999). Coombs' (1998) strategies are positioned according to the situation based on the types of crises and the organization's locus of control. On one hand, when the organization is deemed to have strong personal control over the crisis, more accommodative strategies like full apology are recommended for use. On the other hand, when the organization has weak control over the crisis, more defensive strategies like attack and denial are recommended.

ICM Model: Conceptualizing Emotions in Crisis Responses

While these situation-based crisis responses serve as vital roadmaps to understand the crisis situation, it is argued that a more universal and systemic approach would be to shape crisis responses from an *emotion-based* perspective: To understand what are the emotional upheavals that the publics involved in the crisis are likely to experience so that organizations can streamline their strategies to address their specific needs. Previous studies have found that the perception of a crisis, particularly from a given public, is not strictly a function of an environmental stimulus itself, but involves an interpretation of the stimulus (e.g., see Carver & Blaney, 1977). Emotion is argued to be a critical stimulus. Lazarus (1991) defined emotion as "organized cognitive-motivational-relational configurations whose status changes with changes in the person-environment relationship as this is perceived and evaluated (appraisal)" (p. 38). In a crisis, as the conflict between the publics and the organization escalates, emotions are one of the anchors in the publics' interpretation of what is unfolding, changing, and shaping.

Jin, Pang, and Cameron (2007) have developed a new conceptualization called the Integrated Crisis Mapping model (ICM) aimed at understanding the diverse and varied emotions

likely to be experienced by the key stakeholders in crises. Dominant emotions in the ICM model, developed from integrating works from psychology and crises literature, are extrapolated on two continua. On the X-axis is the publics' coping strategy (from cognitive to conative coping), which consists of the primary public's cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands and on the Y-axis is the level of organizational engagement (from high to low).[34] Different types of crises, drawn from the crisis literature, are mapped into each of the four quadrants, with the dominant and secondary emotions posited.

Empirical tests have suggested theoretical rigor. In the first test to examine the emotions and level of engagement on the first quadrant involving crises pertaining to reputational damage, technological breakdown, industrial matters, labor unrest, and regulation/legislation, findings showed the presence of the anger and anxiety, as posited. Additionally, the emotion of sadness was also found to co-exist with anger and anxiety. The primary publics were found to engage in conative coping (Jin, Pang, Cameron, 2007a). In the second test to examine organizational strategies for the abovementioned crises in the same quadrant, evidence showed that organizations needed only to engage their primary publics moderately rather than intensely. This "strategic holding position" afforded a situation where organizations were able to assume a qualified rhetoric-mixed stance, utilizing a mixed bag of strategies ranging from defensive strategies like excuse and justification as well as accommodative strategies like ingratiation and corrective action to engage their publics (Pang, Jin, & Cameron, 2007). The third test to examine the emotions and levels of engagement on the second and third quadrants of the model, evidence found that anxiety could be the default emotion that publics feel in crises. The subsequent emotions felt by the publics in crises involving hostile takeovers, accidents and natural disasters in the second quadrant were variations of sadness, anger and fright, while the subsequent emotions felt by the publics involving in CEO retirement, rumor and psychopathic acts in the third quadrant were fright and anger. As far as coping strategies were concerned, conative rather than cognitive coping was evident (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007b).

Encouraged by the findings, the authors continue their work on this second-stage development of the model, representing the fourth in the series, by testing strategies for crises posited in quadrants two and three in the model, i.e., hostile takeovers, accidents and natural disasters in the second quadrant and CEO retirement, rumor and psychopathic acts in the third quadrant. The central questions asked are that given the findings of the variations of emotions displayed, how should organizations maintain their positions of being highly and lowly engaged in the respective quadrants? What stance should organizations then assume? What factors are likely to influence this stance? Consequently, what strategies can organizations take so that they reach out to the publics at levels that speak to them?

Data to examine these questions come from content analyses of the population of stories of crises published in the largest circulating and widely influential national newspapers, *USA Today, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post* (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2006; Viguerie & Franke, 2004). The same set of data used to examine the emotions and levels of engagement in the second quadrant – US Airways' takeover bid of

[34] The authors would like to thank Timothy S. Penning of Grand Valley State University for his suggestion to refine this term.

Delta Air Lines in 2006, an example of an economic/hostile takeover; Ameren's handling of power outages in the mid-West in 2006, an example of how an organization deals with a natural disaster; a BP refinery blast at Texas in 2005; an example of how an organization handles an accident; and in the third quadrant, Virginia Tech shooting shooting in 2007, an example of how an organization deals with a psychotic act; speculations surrounding former US Attorney-General Alberto R. Gonzales' resignation in the early stages of the crisis when questions began to be asked of the Justice Department's role in the ouster of eight United States attorneys in 2007; an example of rumors; the mystery surrounding Merck CEO Raymond Gilmartin's retirement in 2005 months after Vioxx was withdrawn; an example of how an organization deals with the tainted circumstances of its CEO retirement – are extended to examine the factor-stance-strategy that influence organizational response in these crises.

This study is significant on several fronts. First, this represents the authors' on-going commitment to test our Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) model. This second-stage development represents the half way mark of our series of empirical studies and the authors are excited to see how the model is shaping up. Second, and more significantly, in the development of the Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) model, it is the authors' goal to advance current understanding in crisis communication and offers practical insights to scholars and practitioners on how they can understand, with greater preciseness, the emotional upheavals their primary publics are likely to experience so that they can shape the appropriate crisis response and tools to manage the crisis with optimal effectiveness. Organizational response in crises through the enactment of strategies has been, and arguably will continue to be, a recurring theme in the developments of crisis communication theories (Coombs, 1999; 2004; Fishman, 1999). Last but not least, the authors aim to build a new theoretical framework by studying real life phenomenon. Saunders (2004) argued that applying theory to real life situations is "useful towards theory building" because such situations "provide observations grounded in actual organizational efforts aimed at solving actual organizational problems" (p. 140). Five cases of the same phenomenon were explored in order to construct a more robust study (Yin, 1993). These cases are studied for their instrumental value rather than intrinsic value. In instrumental case study methodology, Stake (1998) argued that the cases are examined to provide "insight into an issue or refinement of theory" (p. 88). The authors are excited to understand how well the hypotheses posited in our model hold up, and what subsequent refinements need to be made to stand the scrutiny of scholarship as well as its relevance to the practitioners' world.

Theoretical Framework

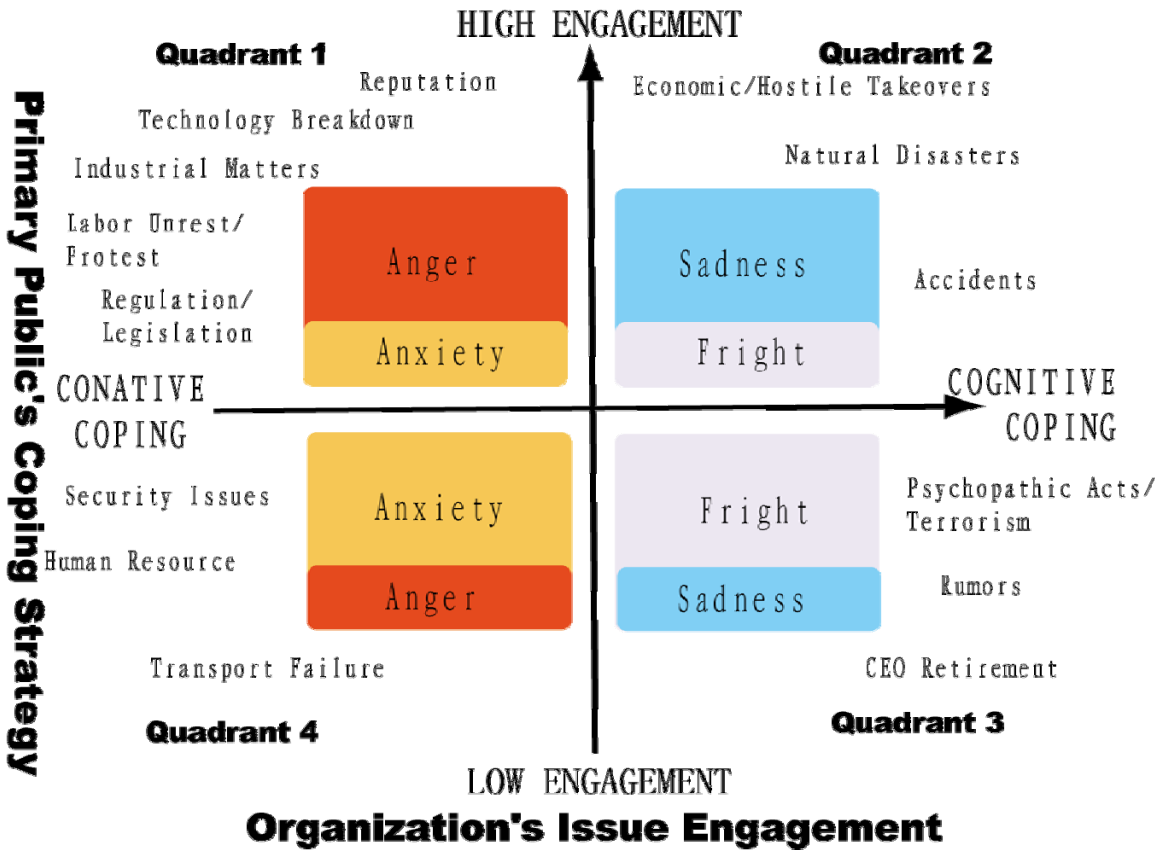
Public Responses Based on Key Emotions

Publics are a "group of people who face a common issue" (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1996, p. 84). In a crisis, the publics have been defined differently, according to their importance to resolving a situation (Lukaszweski, 1997), their functional roles (Dougherty, 1992), and their long-term influences (Ulmer, 2001). Based on previous literature, we propose that in crisis situations the primary publics comprise the following characteristics: 1) They are most affected by the crisis; 2) They have shared common interests, and destiny, in seeing the crisis resolved;

and 3) They have long-term interests, and influences, on the organization's reputation and operation.

Based on the appraisal model of emotion (Lazarus, 1991), Jin, Pang and Cameron (2007) developed a theoretical framework to understand the primary publics' crisis responses, as evidenced by the predominant emotion elicited by different types of crises. Four negative emotions (anger, fright, anxiety, and sadness) are identified as the dominant emotions that are mostly like to be experienced by the publics in crisis situations.

Figure 1. Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) Model (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007)



Anger. The core relational theme underlying anger is a demanding offense against "me" and "mine" (Lazarus, 1991). In crisis situations, the primary publics tend to experience anger when facing a demanding offense from certain organization against them or their well being. The ego-involvement of the public is engaged to preserve or enhance their identity or benefit in the situation. There is usually an issue of blaming that derives from the knowledge that the organization is accountable for the harmful actions and they could have been controlled or even prevented by the organization. The primary public might potentially favor attack as the strategy in facing the organization. At the stance and strategy level, though sometimes the public may appear cooperative, anger can be expressed indirectly in passively aggressive tactics.

Fright. The core relational theme underneath fright is facing uncertain and existential threat (Lazarus, 1991). The public is not certain about how to cope with the loss as well as how the engaged organization may handle this situation. Depending on their resource and power, they may choose avoidance or escape from the crisis as a viable recourse.

Anxiety. By definition, anxiety stems from the core relational theme as facing an immediate, concrete, and overwhelming danger (Lazarus, 1991). The public may feel overwhelmed by the crisis situation and look for the immediate solutions. Their ego-involvement is evidenced as the effort to protect their own ego-identity against the organization whom they perceive to be the direct source of existential threat. They might blame or not blame the organization depending on their environment assessment. Given the uncertainty of how to cope with the situation and what the organization might react, they tend to avoid and escape.

Sadness. Having experienced an irrevocable loss is the core relational theme of the emotion of sadness (Lazarus, 1991). In those cases, the public suffers from tangible or intangible loss or both. Their goal of survival is threatened and this loss of any type of ego-involvement (e.g., esteem, moral values, ideal, people and their well-being, etc.) caused by uncontrollable sources may lead them no one to blame and in desperate need for relief and comfort. If they perceive the loss can be restored or compensated for, their sadness may not occur or will be associated with hope. The action tendency of the public might well depend on what measures the organization may take.

Another key concept in appraisal model of emotion is the different levels of emotions felt at a given time toward a given stimulus. The primary level emotion is the one the public experiences at the first, or immediate, instance. The secondary level emotion is one the public experiences in subsequent instances, as time goes by, and contingent upon the organization's responses to the crisis. The secondary level emotion may be transferred from the dominant emotion or coexisting with the primary level. In this study, we focus on Quadrant 2 (sadness as the primary emotion and fright as the secondary emotion) and Quadrant 3 (fright as the primary emotion and sadness as the secondary emotion) as conjured by crises in CEO retirement; accidents, rumors, psychopathic acts, natural disasters, and economic/hostile takeovers.

Operationalization of the ICM Model

As Figure 1 illustrates, the ICM model is indicated by a crisis matrix based on two axes: The analysis of the organizational engagement level in the crisis that can be examined through a scale of high engagement and low engagement, and the primary public's coping strategy from conative coping to cognitive coping. It is argued that for effective crisis management, the organization, at varied engagement level in different issues, must understand the primary public's emotional demands so as to communicate accordingly and align with the coping strategy needed by the primary public (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007).

On the **X-axis** is the public's coping strategy. Adapting the cognitive appraisal theory in emotion (Lazarus, 1991), there are two types of coping: 1) problem-focused coping – changing the actual relationship between the public and the organization via actual measures and steps, and 2) cognitive-focused coping – changing only the way in which the relationship is interpreted by the public. Therefore, coping strategy refers to the dominant choice of the publics in dealing with the crisis situation: Either 1) cognitive coping – the public try to sort out a way of thinking

or interpreting the meaning of the crisis with regard to their well-being, or 2) conative coping – the public try to manage the situation so as to alter a troubled relationship or to sustain a desirable one by taking actions or at least show their tendency of action. Anchoring these two coping strategies to the axis, different primary publics in different crises may choose different coping strategy along this continuum. Therefore, this X-axis consists of cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands (and conflicts between them) that are appraised as exceeding the resources of the public.

On the **Y-axis** is the level of organizational engagement, ranging from high to low. Jin, Pang and Cameron (2007) defined high organizational engagement as intense, consolidated, sustained, and high priority in allocation of resources to deal with the crisis; on the contrary, low organizational engagement does not mean cursory or no engagement, but that the organization devotes comparatively less resources, effort, and energy to deal with the crisis, either because the organization recognizes there is little it can do, or when the organization did not cause the crisis, it is depending on external help, like a regulatory agency, to help it resolve the crisis.

Emotions and publics' coping mechanism. The two axes further form four quadrants in the crisis matrix: Quadrant1 (High engagement/Conative coping), Quadrant 2 (High engagement/Cognitive coping), Quadrant 3 (Low engagement/Cognitive coping), and Quadrant 4 (Low engagement/Conative coping). In each of the quadrants is the dominant emotions (primary and secondary), based on the confluence, interactions, and inter-relations of the publics' coping strategy as well as organizational engagement.

Organizational Stance and Strategies

Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, and Mitrook (1997) first introduced the notion of organizational stance in the contingency theory of strategic conflict management. A theoretical perspective diametrically different from the excellence theory, which positioned two-way symmetrical model as normative theory (Grunig, 1996), the contingency theory argued that a more realistic description of how organizations engage its publics could be ascertained by the examination of one's stance towards the other. The stance adopted need not be static, and could change based on the influence of organizational factors (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997). Stances were measured through a continuum, which has at one extreme, advocacy, which meant insisting exclusively on one's own interests; and at the other end, accommodation, which meant giving in entirely. Jin and Cameron (2006) further developed a scale measuring stance as degree of action-based accommodation and qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation. Within an organization, the contingency theory had identified more than 80 variables, categorized into 11 themes (see Appendix 1), that could affect stance movement along the continuum (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999).

One's stance necessarily affects one's strategies (Pang, 2006). To study the full range of advocacy or accommodation undertaken by the organization towards its publics and vice versa, we have adapted and modified Coombs' (1998) crisis communication strategies into the contingency framework. Ihlen (2002) argued that Coombs has built a "better typology" (p. 190) than other sets of strategies. Coombs' (1998) typology consisted of seven strategies: Attack, denial, excuse, corrective action, justification, ingratiation, and full apology. To reflect the true

spirit of the contingency theory, we modified this framework by reordering corrective action and justification, and by adding another strategy, cooperation, into the continuum.

Advocacy Accommodation
I----------I--------I----------I----------I----------I----------I----------I
Attack Denial Excuse Justification Corrective action Ingratiation Cooperation Full apology

Armed with these findings from three empirical tests so far, the authors extend this study to examine, through the crises in Quadrant 2 (High Engagement/Conative Coping) and Quadrant 3 (Low engagement/Conative Coping),

RQ 1: What stance (action-based versus qualified-rhetoric) did the organizations take toward its primary publics?

RQ 2: What contingent factor appears to influence this stance?

RQ 3: What is the strategy used?

RQ 4: How does the organization assess its strategy effectiveness?

RQ 5: How do the primary publics assess the organization's strategy effectiveness?

Method

We attempted to continue understanding the veracity and rigor of the ICM model using content analyses of crisis cases in the second and third quadrants. Kaid (1996) argued that analyses of crisis events through media coverage are well-trodden paths taken by researchers. The purpose of case studies is to empirically investigate a "contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" and address a "situation in which the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 1993, p. 59). In this study, we adopt a multiple case study design within the same phenomenon, with the primary interest of understanding how the ICM model works. The cases are thus studied for their instrumental value rather than intrinsic value (Stake, 1998). Though the cases are analyzed in detail, contexts examined, and activities explored, these play supporting roles to the researchers' objectives, which are to facilitate understanding of how relevant they are to the model. Consequently, by applying the method on six disparately managed cases, Yin (1993) argued, is an appropriate initial attempt at theory testing (p. 64), with the aim of building "analytic generalizations" (Yin, 2003, p. 33) from the conceptualization.

Sample

Six crises are selected based on the opinions and suggestions of a group of public relations practitioners and educators. Shin, Cheng, Jin, and Cameron (2005) as well as Pang, Jin and Cameron (2007) found this to be a viable way of identifying the appropriate crises to analyze. The six cases are: Merck CEO retirement (N=10), an example of CEO retirement; BP refinery blast (N=18), an example of accidents; Rumors of Gonzalez resignation (N=18), an example of rumors; Virginia Tech shooting (N=16), an example of psychopathic acts; Ameren deals with power outages (N=14), an example of natural disasters; and US Airways' takeover bid of Delta Air Lines (N=20), an example of economic/hostile takeovers (see appendix 2 for fuller descriptions of the cases). Data to examine Quadrant 2 and Quadrant 3 of the ICM model comes

from content analyses of the population of stories published in the largest circulating and widely influential national newspapers, *USA Today, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post* (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2006; Viguerie & Franke, 2004).

News stories in the five major newspapers (N= 96) were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words of the organization and the crisis. News stories were excluded if 1) there was no comment made by a spokesperson from the respective organization or official from the organization or no mention of any official communication from the organization; or 2) the stories were in the same publication or there was no mention of the crisis.

Coders and Training

Two coders, both graduate students and familiar with the content analysis method, conducted the coding. With the help of a codebook, the coders were given detailed instruction and description of the various categories used. Two practice sessions were held in December 2006 using samples of stories to familiarize with the coding instruments. The coders worked independently and were not allowed to consult with each other about the coding. The inter-coder reliability achieved .84 using Scott's Pi.

Coding Instrument

The unit of analysis is defined as a news story. This includes stories by the staff of the newspaper and wire stories from the editors. The content analysis instrument is designed to evaluate the appraisal of crisis engagement and coping strategies from organizations' and their primary publics' perspectives. The 96 stories were coded for the following variables:

Organizational stance: Items from Jin and Cameron (2006)'s stance inventory were used to examine two clusters of stances as degree of accommodation, on a 7-point Likert-like scale, with 1 as "not evident" and 7 as "very evident": 1) The organization takes Action-Based Stance toward the public (The organization seems willing to: yield to the public's demands; Or agree to follow what the public proposed; Or accept the publics' propositions; Or agree with the public on future action or procedure; Or agree to try the solutions suggested by the public; Or any combination of these.); and 2) The organization takes Qualified-Rhetoric-mixed Stance toward the public (The organization seems willing to: express regret or apologized to the public; Or collaborate with the public in order to solve the problem at hand; Or change my own position toward that of the public; Or make concessions with the public; Or admit wrongdoing; Or any combination of these.).

Dominant contingent factor: Dominant contingent factor that drives the organization's stance with regards to its public was identified, using the matrix of contingent factors as: External Threats, Industry Environment, General Political/Social Environment/External Culture, External Public, Issue Under Question, Organization's Characteristics, Influence of Public Relations Practitioners, Influence of Dominant Coalition, Internal Threats, Individual Characteristics, and Relationship Characteristics. If there was no evident contingent factor in the story, it was coded as "99. N/A".

Primary crisis response strategy: crisis response strategies by level of responsibility acceptance (Coombs, 1999): Attack, Denial, Excuse, Justification, Ingratiation, Corrective action, and Full apology, as well as 99 as N/A in case of stories with no crisis strategy evident.

Message attributes: The overall attributes of crisis communication response messages were measured on three continuums, using a 7-point Likert-type scale: 1) Defense-Accommodation continuum, with 1 = "Defensive" and 7 as "Accommodative"; 2) Ambiguity-Specification continuum, with 1 = "Ambiguous" and 7 as "Specific"; and 3) Emotion-Cognition continuum, with 1 = "Emotional" and 7 as "Factual".

Organization's self-assessment of strategy effectiveness: It was measured on a 7 point Likert-like scale, where 1 was "very ineffective," and 7 was "very effective", and 99 was used if this variable was not addressed in the story.

Public's acceptance of the organization's crisis strategy: It was measured on a 7 point Likert-like scale, where 1 was "very unacceptable," and 7 was "very acceptable", and 99 was used if this variable was not addressed in the story.

Results

Organizational Stance

RQ 1 examined the stance taken by the organizations towards their primary publics. For BP case, more qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation was taken ($M = 5.50$, $SD = .857$) than action-based accommodation ($M = 5.17$, $SD = .786$) ($t = 1.844$, $p < .10$). For Virginia Tech case, more qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation was taken ($M = 4.06$, $SD = .854$) than action-based accommodation ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .619$) ($t = 2.782$, $p < .05$). For Gonzalez case, more qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation was taken ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .686$) than action-based accommodation ($M = 3.67$, $SD = .485$) ($t = 3.367$, $p < .01$). However, for Merck case, more action-based accommodation was taken ($M = 4.30$, $SD = .483$) than qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .000$) ($t = 1.964$, $p < .10$). For US Air case and Ameren case, there was no significant difference in terms of the two types of stance. Across the six cases, more qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation was taken ($M = 4.41$, $SD = .928$) than action-based accommodation ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .887$) ($t = 3.195$, $p < .01$).

Dominant Contingent Factor

RQ 2 examined what contingent factors appeared to influence the stance movement. For BP case, relationship characteristics (33.3%), individual characteristics (27.8%), and external threats (22.2%) were the dominant contingent factors (Chi-square = 119.342, $p < .001$). For US Air case, relationship characteristics (30.0%) and influence of dominant coalition (30.0%) were the dominant contingent factors (Chi-square = 119.342, $p < .001$). For Ameren case, influence of PR practitioners (50.0%) and relationship characteristics (42.9%) were the dominant contingent factors (Chi-square = 119.342, $p < .001$). For Merck case, influence of dominant coalition (18.8%) and individual characteristics (30.0%) were the dominant contingent factors (Chi-square = 119.342, $p < .001$). For Virginia Tech case, influence of dominant coalition (37.5%) and issues under question (31.3%) were the dominant contingent factors (Chi-square = 119.342, $p < .001$). For Gonzalez case, influence of dominant coalition (24.0%), influence of PR practitioners (21.9%) and individual characteristics (21.9%) were the dominant contingent factors (Chi-square = 119.342, $p < .001$). Across the six cases, different contingent factors seemed to make a significant difference in both degrees of action-based accommodation ($F = 4.915$, $p < .001$) and qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation ($F = 4.947$, $p < .001$). Post-hoc

Scheffe tests were used to examine the difference between the contingent factors: On one hand, external threats led to significantly ($p < .05$) higher degrees of action-based accommodation ($M = 5.75$, $SD = .500$) than issue under question ($M = 3.75$, $SD = .886$), influence of PR practitioners ($M = 4.10$, $SD = .539$), influence of dominant coalition ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .674$), and individual characteristics ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.14$) did. On the other hand, eternal threats also led to significantly ($p < .01$) higher degrees of qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation ($M = 6.25$, $SD = .957$) than issue under question ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .756$), influence of PR practitioners ($M = 4.14$. $SD = .573$) and individual characteristics ($M = 4.24$, $SD = .1.179$) did, as well as significantly ($p < .05$) higher degrees of qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation than influence of dominant coalition ($M = 4.35$, $SD = .775$) did.

Primary Crisis Strategy and Message Attributes

RQ 3 examined what were the primary crisis response strategies used by the organizations, as well as what message attributes were evident for those strategies. For BP case, corrective action (38.9%), ingratiation (27.8%) and justification (22.2%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, $p < .001$). For US Air case, justification (75.0%) and ingratiation (25.0%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, $p < .001$). For Ameren case, corrective action (88.9%) and excuse (11.1%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, $p < .001$). For Merck case, justification (50.0%) and denial (40.0%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, $p < .001$). For Virginia Tech case, excuse (43.8%) and ingratiation (25.0%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, $p < .001$). For Gonzalez case, justification (33.0%) and excuse (19.8%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, $p < .001$). Across the six cases, crisis strategies had significant influence on three message attribute continuums (Defensive-Accommodative, $F = 11.095$, $p < .001$; Ambiguous-Specific, $F = 11.510$, $p < .001$; and Emotional-Factual, $F = 5.248$, $p < .001$). Post-hoc Scheffe tests were used to examine the difference between the primary crisis strategies: For denial ($M = 4.10$, $SD = .316$), it led to significantly more defensive message attributes than full apology ($M = 6.50$, $SD = .707$; $p < .05$) did. For excuse ($M = 3.78$, $SD = .943$), it led to significantly more defensive message attributes than corrective action ($M = 4.94$, $SD = .899$; $p < .05$) and full apology ($M = 6.50$, $SD = .707$; $p < .01$) did. For justification ($M = 3.41$, $SD = .867$), it led to significantly more defensive message attributes than ingratiation ($M = 4.42$, $SD = .900$; $p < .05$), corrective action ($M = 4.94$, $SD = .899$; $p < .001$) and full apology ($M = 6.50$, $SD = .707$; $p < .01$) did.

For Ambiguous-Specific message attributes, denial was found to be significantly more ambiguous ($M = 2.70$. $SD = 1.567$, $p < .01$) than excuse ($M = 4.44$, $SD = .922$), justification ($M = 4.50$, $SD = .938$), ingratiation ($M = 4.85$, $SD = .987$), corrective action ($M = 5.69$, $SD = .946$) and full apology ($M = 6.00$, $SD = .000$). Excuse ($M = 4.44$, $SD = .922$, $p < .01$) and justification ($M = 4.50$, $SD = .938$, $p < .01$) was found to be significantly more specific than denial ($M = 2.70$. $SD = 1.567$) and corrective action ($M = 5.69$, $SD = .946$). For Emotional-Factual message attributes, corrective action ($M = 5.50$, $SD = .894$) was found to be significantly more emotional than ingratiation ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.038$; $p < .05$), while ingratiation was found to be more emotional than denial ($M = 5.80$, $SD = .632$, $p < .01$) and excuse ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 1.042$, $p < .05$).

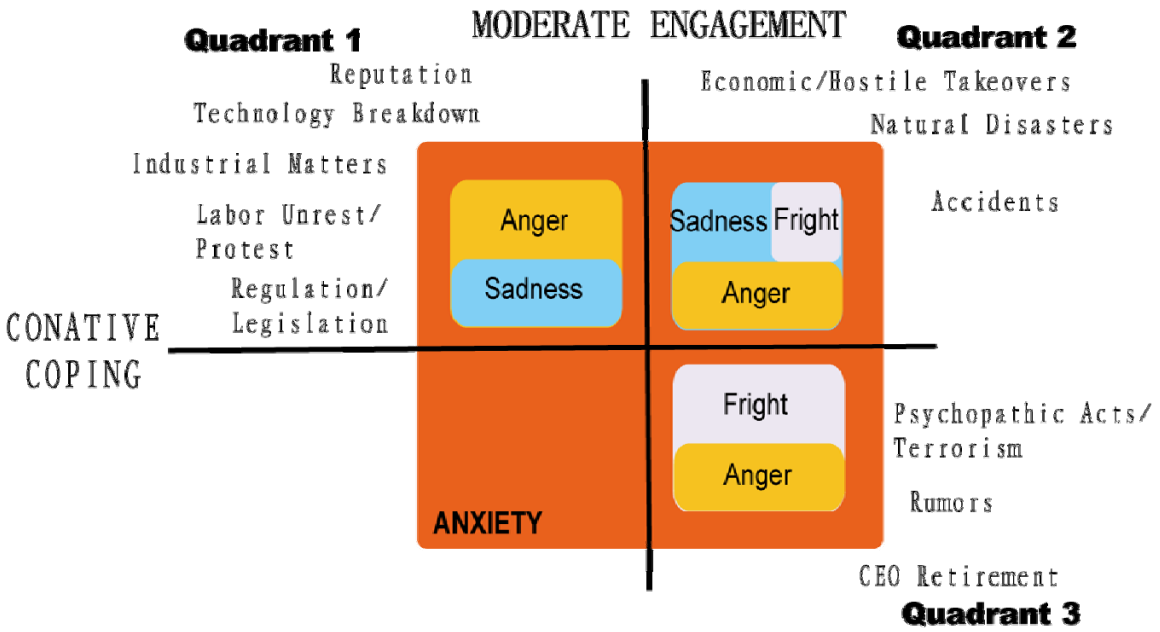
Organization's Self-Assessment of Strategy Effectiveness and Publics' Acceptance

RQ 4 examined how the organization assessed its crisis strategy effectiveness, whereas RQ 5 examines how acceptable the primary publics perceive the strategy was. For US Air case, the primary publics found the organization's crisis strategy was less acceptable ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.317$) than the organization assessed its own strategy's effectiveness ($M = 4.44$, $SD = .964$) ($t = -2.702$, $p < .05$). For Ameren case, the primary publics found the organization's crisis strategy was less acceptable ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .894$) than the organization assessed its own strategy's effectiveness ($M = 5.20$, $SD = .837$) ($t = -2.702$, $p < .10$). For Merck case, the primary publics found the organization's crisis strategy was less acceptable ($M = 3.20$, $SD = .447$) than the organization assessed its own strategy's effectiveness ($M = 4.40$, $SD = .548$) ($t = -6.000$, $p < .01$). For Gonzalez case, the primary publics found the organization's crisis strategy was less acceptable ($M = 3.50$, $SD = .527$) than the organization assessed its own strategy's effectiveness ($M = 4.20$, $SD = .632$) ($t = -2.333$, $p < .05$). There was no significant difference between the strategy assessment from the organization and its primary publics in BP case and Virginia Tech case. Across the six cases, the organizations assessed their own strategies as more effective ($M = 4.68$, $SD = .785$) than the primary publics' acceptance level ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.227$) ($t = 4.990$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

The findings are distilled into two categories: First, what the evidence suggests as strong merit; and second, evidence that suggests as some merit. Implications of the evidence are drawn, with suggestions to refine the ICM model (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Revised ICM Model (Quadrant 1-3)



Organizations' Initial Response: Qualified Rhetoric-mixed Stance as Default Stance?

RQ 1 examined the stance taken by the organizations towards their primary publics. Evidence suggests some merit that organizations embroiled in the types of crises identified in the two quadrants engaged in qualified rhetoric-mixed stance towards their primary publics rather than action-based stance. In the former, the organization is willing to express regret and apologize to the public, to collaborate with the public, to make concessions or to admit wrongdoing. In the latter, the organization is willing to yield to the public's demands, accept the public's propositions, and agree to the public's suggestion for solution while in the former, it contains more rhetoric or posturing by the organization, and may or may not lead to action that supports the rhetoric. Therefore, saying what one *is willing to do* only tantamount to posturing, or qualified rhetoric-mixed stance. Saying what one *will do* is an indication of action-based stance.

Interestingly, though the authors have only analyzed three of the four quadrants so far, two consistent trends begin to surface: While the previous study found that anxiety could be the initial *default* dominant emotion (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007b) felt by the publics in any given crisis, evidence from this study suggests that a qualified rhetoric-mixed stance could be the *default* stance adopted by organizations to its primary stakeholders. The findings are supported by the literature. It could be that at any given crisis, while time needs to be afforded to unearth the actual facts of the crisis, organizations need to respond quickly to the stakeholders, otherwise, as Coombs (1999) argued, "speculation and misinformation will fill the information void if an organization is silent or slow to respond" (p. 126). Adopting a qualified rhetoric-mixed stance or a rhetorical posture promising to work with the stakeholders to find a resolution to the crisis appears to be the logical manner to engage the publics at the first instance. Coombs (1999) described such responses as "form recommendations", the posture of responding quickly, being open and consistent (p. 126). Such responses, Coombs (1999) argued, are widely accepted and practiced by practitioners. Given that crisis managers should often select strategies that "best serve to protect the organization" (Coombs, 2006, p. 255), a qualified rhetoric-mixed stance is thus argued to be the accepted initial, and possibly the *default* stance.

Strategies Reflect Levels of Organization Involvements

RQ 2 examined what contingent factors appeared to influence the stance movement. RQ 3 examined the primary crisis response strategies used by the organizations, as well as what message attributes were evident for those strategies. These would be discussed conjointly. Evidence suggests strong merit that relationship between the organization and publics is a dominant contingent factor in crises involving hostile takeovers, accidents and natural disasters as posited in the second quadrant, in which the dominant emotion is proposed and identified in previous studies as sadness. With relationship as a driving factor, and qualified rhetoric-mixed stance as the platform, evidence suggests some merit that the corresponding strategy used was corrective action. This appears to be congruent with previous findings that organizations involved in the abovementioned crises need to be highly engaged with their stakeholders (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007b).

What, then, does it mean for practitioners? For easier comprehension, the question can also be asked this way: If, indeed, that organizations involved in the abovementioned crises need to be highly engaged with their publics (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007b), how is this engagement actualized? Answer: By adopting a rhetorical posture promising corrective action to repair the damage caused by the crisis. And what motivates the organization to do that? The importance the organization places on its relationship with its publics. Even though relationship has been cited as an important factor in the crisis and public relations literature (see Ledingham, 2003; Lee & Hwang, 2007; Ulmer, 2001), it is a factor not well addressed in the contingency theory (see Cameron, Pang, Jin, 2007; Pang, Jin, & Cameron, 2007). Contingency theory has thus far enacted relationship as past experiences with publics, a less supported predisposing factor (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999). While it is beyond the scope of this study to understand how relationship as a factor can be further operationalized in contingency research, the evidence in this study does present an opportunity for contingency theorists to reexamine the criticality of this factor.

In crises involving CEO retirement, rumor and psychopathic acts as posited in the third quadrant, in which the dominant emotion is proposed and identified in previous studies as fright, evidence suggests strong merit that the influence of the dominant coalition is a dominant contingent factor. Again, what, then, does it mean for practitioners? For easier comprehension, the question can again be asked this way: If, indeed, that organizations involved in the abovementioned crises need *not* be highly engaged with their publics (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007b), how is this engagement actualized? Answer: By adopting a rhetorical posture justifying why the blame is not entirely the organization's to shoulder, either by arguing that there is no serious damage or injury, or by shifting some of the blame to the victims. And who directs the organization to do that? The dominant coalition. Conceivably, the dominant coalition as a predisposing factor in the contingency theory (Cameron, Pang, Jin, 2007) has the overriding power and influence to dictate the course of action. In the abovementioned crises, what our studies have found are that the dominant coalition does not consider it necessary to be highly engaged with the publics, and thus adopts a rhetorically justifying posture to engage the organization's publics.

Addressing Communication Gap between Organizational Approach and Publics' Emotions: Use of "Emo-action Language" rather than Emotional Language

RQ 4 examined how the organization assessed its crisis strategy effectiveness, whereas RQ 5 examined how acceptable the primary publics perceived the organizations' strategy. These are examined conjointly. Evidence suggests strong merit that the organizations involved in all of the abovementioned crises regarded its strategies as acceptable and effective, i.e., in quadrant two, organizations maintain highly engaged with their publics by adopting a qualified rhetoric-mixed stance using the strategy of correction action peppered with emotional language in their messages that are filled with emotional descriptors rather than the issue at hand whereas in quadrant three, organizations need not be highly engaged with their publics. The stance adopted is a qualified rhetoric-mixed stance using the strategy of justification littered with emotional language in their messages that address the publics' feelings and emotions but not the issue at hand. In layman parlance, what this all means is that the organizations feel that they are doing a fine job in reaching out to the publics – but the publics do not think so. Why?

A plausible explanation is that in crises involving hostile takeovers, accidents and natural disasters as posited in the second quadrant, the publics experience a diversity of emotions, beginning with anxiety, mixed with variants of sadness, anger, and fright (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007a). Even though organizations remain highly engaged, the posturing stance adopted, though enthused with promises, does not appear sufficient to assuage or reassure the publics. Where possible, organizations should move beyond initial posturing to real action, i.e., from a qualified rhetoric-mix stance to action-based stance, peppered with messages that use what we term "emo-action language", language that acknowledges the emotional upheavals the publics experience with promises of concurrent action to alleviate their emotional turmoil. Another plausible explanation pertains to crises involving CEO retirement, rumor and psychopathic acts as posited in the third quadrant. Even though it was found that organizations involved in these crises need not be highly engaged (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007b), the fact that the publics experience a diversity of emotions ranging from anxiety, fright to anger could mean that organizations could not afford to be *seen* as being in a position of low engagement, disengagement, or even no engagement. Beyond extending the rigor and rhetoric of showing compassion, concern and empathy (Seegar, 2006), where people's emotions are at stake, there is the constant need to be *seen* to engage and connect with them in their hours of need. This insight is instructive for further refinement of the ICM model, that perhaps there is no such thing as high or low engagement in crisis? As the authors continue our journey of discovery, perhaps we should redefine engagement on different dimensions, probably along the lines of action-engagement in place of high engagement and emotional-engagement in place of low engagement?

Conclusion and Limitations

This present study represents the second-stage of testing to investigate the viability of the ICM model by integrating crisis perspectives with psychological analyses. This study, the fourth in the series of empirical tests, represents the continuing work of the authors to generate what Yin (2003) termed "analytic generalization" (p. 33) in the model. Analytic generalization is achieved when "two or more cases" (Bennett, 2004, p. 22) support the theoretical assertions (Yin, 2003, p. 33). Though much of what the authors have been studying is still exploratory, findings suggested theoretical rigor in the model, with room for further refinements. Admittedly, one limitation of this study is that the analyses are all based on media reports. First, given the small number of newspaper articles that were relevant to the crisis cases, the statistical power of detecting associations among the coding variables was limited. Second, this study excluded media releases and letters or opinion section of newspapers that might have provided valuable information on the organization's crisis strategies as well as the publics' expression of emotions. Further research should include examination of messages disseminated through media releases as well as interviews with practitioners and focus groups with publics involved in the respective crises. Yet, it is the authors' thesis that studies analyzing audience reception in crises should increasingly dominate crisis scholarship for the simple argument that organizational strategies would be ineffectual if these do not appeal to the hearts and minds of the publics the organizations are trying to reach. An analysis of the papers presented at the International Public Relations Research Conference bear testimony to the authors' argument of the increasing importance of understanding emotions in crisis research. In 2005 and 2006, there was no paper

studying emotions in crisis (see www.instituteforpr.org/files/uploads/IPRRC8_Schedule.pdf and www.instituteforpr.org/files/uploads/IPPRC9_Schedule.pdf). In 2007, there were two (www.instituteforpr.org/files/uploads/IPRRC10_Schedule.pdf) including one by the authors. Much work remains to be done. As Einstein (1936) said, "The whole of science is nothing more than a refinement of everyday thinking" (cited in Bartlett, 1992, p. 635). That's what the authors endeavor to do with the ICM model.

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Appendix 1: Analysis of contingent factor (adapted from the Contingency theory)

1. Threats: litigation, government regulation, potentially damaging publicity, scarring of organization's reputation in community, legitimizing activists' claims
2. Industry Environment: changing (dynamic) or static, number of competitors/level of competition, richness or leanness of resources in the environment
3. General Political/Social Environment / External Culture (level of constraint/uncertainty): degree of political support of business, degree of social support of business
4. The External Public (group, individual, etc.): size/number of members, degree of source credibility/powerful members or connections, past successes or failures of public to evoke change, amount of advocacy practiced by organization, level of communication/involvement of public/s members, whether the public has public relations counselors or not, community's perception of public: reasonable or radical level of media coverage the public has received in past, whether representatives of the public know or like representatives of the organization, whether representatives of the organization know or like representatives from the public, public's willingness to dilute its cause/request/claims moves and countermoves, relative power of organization, relative power of public
5. Issue Under Question: size, stakes, complexity
6. Organization's Characteristics: open or closed culture, dispersed widely geographically or centralized, level of technology the organization uses to produce its product or service, homogeneity or heterogeneity of employees, age of the organization/value placed on tradition, speed of growth in the knowledge level the organization uses, economic stability of the organization, existence or non-existence of issues management personnel or program, organization's past experiences with the public, distribution of decision-making power, formalization: number of rules or codes defining and limiting the job descriptions of employees, stratification/hierarchy of positions, existence or influence of legal department, business exposure (product mix and customer mix), corporate culture
7. Public Relations Department Characteristics: total number of practitioners and number with college degrees, type of past training of employees: trained in PR or ex-journalists, marketing, etc., location of PR department in hierarchy: independent or under marketing umbrella/ experiencing encroachment of marketing/ persuasive mentality, representation in the dominant coalition experience level of PR practitioners in dealing with conflict, general communication competency of department autonomy of department physical placement of department in building (near CEO and other top decision makers or not) staff trained in research methods, amount of funding available for dealing with external publics, amount of time allowed to use dealing with external publics, gender: percentage of female upper-level staff/ managers, potential of department to practice various models of public relations
8. Characteristics of Dominant Coalition (top management): political values (conservative or liberal), open or closed to change, management style (domineering or laid back), general altruism level, support and understanding of PR, frequency of external contact

with publics, department perception of the organization's external environment, calculation of potential rewards or losses using different strategies with external publics, degree of line manager involvement in external affairs

9. Internal Threats (how much is at stake in the situation): economic loss or gain from implementing various stances, marring of employees' or stockholders' perception of the company, marring of the personal reputations of the company decision makers (image in employees' perceptions and general pubic's perception
10. Individual Characteristics (public relations practitioner, dominant coalition and line managers): training in PR, marketing, journalism, engineering, etc., personal ethics, tolerance of ability to deal with uncertainty, comfort level with conflict or dissonance, comfort level with change, ability to recognize potential and existing problems, extent of openness to innovation, extent to which individual can grasp others' world-views, personality: dogmatic, authoritarian, communication competency, cognitive complexity: ability to handle complex problems, predisposition towards negotiation, predisposition towards altruism, how individuals receive, process and use information and influence, familiarity with external public or its representative, like external public or its representative, gender: female versus male
11. Relationship Characteristics: level of trust between organization and external public, dependency of parties involved, ideological barriers between organization and public
12. Others: None of the above

Appendix 2: Details of the cases studied

Merck CEO retires: A popular pain and arthritis drug that was consumed by millions worldwide since it launched in 1999, Vioxx, which chalked up global sales amounting to US$2.5 billion in 2003 alone, was withdrawn from the market on September 30, 2004. Merck & Co, which manufactured the drug, withdrew it after a trial showed that those who took 25mg of Vioxx daily for more than 18 months were twice as likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke as those on placebo. The withdrawal was described as the largest voluntary drug recall in history. Merck said the withdrawal was to protect patients from further risks. However, the onslaught of criticism from the medical fraternity, lawsuits by patients, and investigations by the Justice Department and the Securities and Exchange Commission, continued. In May 2005, CEO Raymond Gilmartin, who, by far, had been Merck's most prominent defender in the controversy, resigned abruptly. Merck said he retired. The population of stories about Gilmartin's retirement were sourced from October 2004 to May 2005. News stories were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (Merck, Vioxx, CEO, retirement, Gilmartin). Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 10.

BP refinery blast: On March 23, 2005, a powerful explosion rocked BP's refining complex in Texas City, Texas, about 35 miles southeast of downtown Houston, injuring more than 100 people and killing 15 people. The blast occurred on the western side of the sprawling 1,200-acre complex in one of the units used to make high-grade fuels. According to a BP report, operators overfilled and overheated a processing tower at a unit that housed hydrocarbon liquid

and vapor. The liquid and vapor mix over-pressurized, flooded into an adjacent stack and escaped into the atmosphere. The resulting vapor cloud was ignited by an unknown source. The report added that it was human error. BP quickly admitted fault for the blast. The population of stories about this blast were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (BP, refinery, explosion, blast). Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 18.

Rumors of Gonzales resignation: Former US Attorney-General Alberto R. Gonzales' troubles intensified from March 2007 when questions were asked of the Justice Department surrounding the ouster of eight United States attorneys and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's use of expanded surveillance powers to improperly obtain personal records of citizens. A leading Democrat, Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York, began to call for his resignation. Gonzales initially responded by claiming he was "not involved in any discussions about what was going on", only to concede later at a Senate hearing that he knew about them though he did not select any of the prosecutors slated for dismissal in 2006. He claimed he had delegated the effort to his former chief of staff, D. Kyle Sampson. From March to April, rumors were rife as to whether he would resign even as he was fighting hard to keep his job. The population of stories about this rumor were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (Gonzales, attorney general, step down, resign). Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 18. Gonzales did resign after all, on August 27, 2007.

Virginia Tech shooting: In what was described as the deadliest shooting rampage in American history, a gunman, Seung-Hui Cho, embarked on two shooting attacks at Virginia Tech University in April 2007, killing 32 and injuring at least 15. There was a two-hour gap between the first shootings, when two people were killed, and the second, when Cho stalked through the halls of an engineering building across campus, shooting at professors and students in classrooms and hallways, firing dozens of rounds. Cho, described as a loner, filmed himself in between the attacks. In a video sent to NBC and later broadcast, Cho vented his hatred of other students and his grandiose self-view. He killed himself after the second attack. The population of stories about this psychopathic act were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (Virginia tech, gunman). Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 16.

Ameren deals with power outages : Thousands of residents in Missouri and Illinois went without power for nearly a week in the cold of the winter after a nasty storm plowed through the Midwest in early December 2006. At least 19 deaths were blamed on the storm. However, it was the St. Louis-based Ameren Corp's dealing of this natural disaster that came under scrutiny. Missouri Governor Matt Blunt described Ameren's handling of the crisis "unacceptable." "Missourians expect and should receive reliable service from their utility companies," he said. Illinois Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn called for utility regulators to investigate into the lingering power disruptions. Despite Ameren's insistence that it had poured every available resource into rectifying the power outage, residents remained outraged. The population of stories about the handling of this natural disaster were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (power outage, storms, Ameren). Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 14.

US Airways' takeover bid of Delta Air Lines: In an effort to become the largest airline in the world, US Airways made an audacious US$8.5 billion bid for the Delta Air Lines in November 2006, even though Delta had rebuffed earlier advances a few months earlier in the

summer. Undeterred, US Airways, which operates a vast network of both international and domestic routes, this time made an unsolicited offer to the creditors of Delta, which was operating under bankruptcy protection. Delta was the fourth-largest domestic airline in the US. US Airways took the hostile takeover further by presenting its case to the Delta creditors even as Delta was trying to shore up support from its creditors that it would emerge from the bankruptcy protection as stand-alone company. The battle, however, did not last for long. US Airways withdrew its improved US$10.2 billion offer after it failed to win the support of Delta creditors, which included the Boeing Company and the federal pension agency, in January 2007. The population of stories about this hostile takeover were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (US Airways, Delta Air Lines, takeover). Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 20.