

EXPLORING A MULTI-STAGE MODEL OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT:
UTILITIES, HURRICANES, AND CONTINGENCY

By

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The purpose of this study was to explore the three-stage model of crisis management and determine what influence the contingency theory of accommodation's highly-supported-predisposing and situational variables have on crisis management.

This qualitative study examines crisis management practices of municipal utility companies in the state of Florida. Participants discussed their organization's crisis management practices in conjunction with the very active 2004 hurricane season. A modified Delphi study was used to collect data from senior-level public relations and corporate communications professionals from a cross-section of state municipal utility companies. Primary and secondary questions referencing each stage of the three-stage model of crisis management were generated to identify the variables that most affected organizational crisis management.

The findings expose a relationship between the highly-supported-predisposing and situational variables of the contingency theory and the three-stage model of crisis

management. This study serves as a springboard for future quantitative research that may be able to generate a statistical correlation between the contingency theory's highly-supported variables and the three-stage model of crisis management.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Managing crises is a vital aspect of public relations practice as all organizations experience them. As one practitioner explains, “no one is immune. Crises are non-discriminatory. They don’t care who gets in the way. It’s not a matter of ‘if,’ in most cases, but simply ‘when.’” (Wilson, 2004, paragraph 2). Likewise, L. Grunig, J. Grunig and Dozier (2002) asserted, “Regardless of the model of public relations practiced or the expertise of the communicator, crises inevitably befall organizations” (p. 473). The belief that a crisis situation will not strike an organization must change; the mentality must shift from if, to when. Indeed, crises are a reality that companies, government agencies and nonprofit organizations alike must recognize. The incidence of crises is not a new phenomenon, but increasingly catastrophic results have validated their relevance in public relations.

The ubiquitousness of crisis situations necessitates the creation of a widely accepted model of a crisis management that provides organizations the framework to assist in the survival of a crisis event. Though there are models that explore crisis management, these models have yet to include a concrete theoretical underpinning. This qualitative study attempts to begin grounding the three-stage model of crisis management in the contingency theory of accommodation.

The researcher believes that the contingency theory’s highly-supported-predisposing and situational variables, identified by Cancel et al. (1999), will emerge as influential to crisis management. The researcher proposes that the predisposing variables

will appear in the participant responses during precrisis stage while the situational variables will emerge in the crisis stage of the three-stage model of crisis management. This study will test this hypothesis while also exploring the role of the contingency theory variables in crisis management.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Reality of a Crisis

Although all types of organizations are vulnerable to a crisis, certain industries are inherently more prone to a crisis event. L. Grunig et al. (2002) quoted a practitioner who refers to the insurance industry as a “crisis by definition” (p. 473). Among the many reasons cited by scholars and practitioners to prepare for a crisis is one advanced by Howard and Mathews (2000). Preparation is needed, they said, “. . .because you cannot control the elements, human nature or the outside world” (p. 217). This statement outlines the difficulty of crisis management; though practitioners and organizations can prepare for numerous scenarios, there are many more they have no control over.

Before further discussion, the definition of a crisis must be established. Scholars have defined the term *crisis* in a number of ways. As defined by Sapriel (2003), a crisis is “an event, revelation, allegation or set of circumstances which threatens the integrity, reputation, or survival of an individual or organisation” (p. 348). Shrivastava, Mitroff, Miller, and Miglani (1988) presented an in-depth definition of a crisis as

An organizationally-based disaster, which causes extensive damage and social disruption, involves multiple stakeholders, and unfolds through complex technological, organizational, and social processes. (p. 285)

Much of the literature discusses crises at the organizational level. In doing so, the definition of a crisis has focused on only a segment of crises. Pauchant and Mitroff (1992) developed a definition of a crisis that can apply to more than just organizationally based events. The authors discuss a crisis as “a disruption that physically affects a

system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, its existential core” (p.15). This definition encompasses non-organization crises, such as natural disasters, that have an effect, not only on individual organizations, but rather a community system as a whole.

Other scholars take a more basic approach to defining a crisis. Coombs (1999a) described a crisis as something that embarrasses or challenges an organization’s character and that demands an explanation. González-Herrero and Pratt (1996) defined a crisis as something that is simply “unwelcome and sudden” (p. 82). Lastly, Coombs and Holladay (2001) defined a crisis as “one event or interaction within a larger relationship between an organization and its stakeholders. . .[that can] damage or be a threat to a quality relationship” (p.324). Though the depths of definitions vary, they each employ the same principle: A crisis is an event that can drastically affect the ability of an organization to sustain itself. This will serve as the definition of a crisis for discussion throughout this study.

A danger that organizations sometimes face is the issue of a perceived crisis. Organizations may leap into crisis management protocols for mere transgressions. For example, the resignation of an organization’s Chief Financial Officer alone is not a crisis and does not warrant the use of crisis protocols. If the resignation of a CFO is the result of financial malfeasance, though, the organization should address the situation as a possible crisis. Organizations need to be able to differentiate between perceived and real crises.

Issues Management

González-Herrero and Pratt (1996) posit that a crisis is sudden. Although the onset of a crisis can be sudden, there are situations when organizations are aware of and

prepared for such an event. Though many factors influence the outcome of a crisis, Smits and Ezzat (2003) posit that preparation is one of – if not the – most important steps in the prevention of a crisis, “Effective crisis management depends upon planning and people” (p. 2). Penrose (2000) stated, “Researchers tend to agree that organizations that practice proactive crisis management will lessen the damage of a crisis” (p. 155). Indeed, González-Herrero and Pratt (1996) also explained that crises have early signals and, “...sensing potential problems is the first step toward avoiding or resolving them or minimizing their impact” (p. 82).

Issues management helps an organization become aware of possible crises and plan accordingly. One facet of this awareness involves determining those publics which could lead or contribute to a crisis. As J. Grunig and Repper (1992) explained, “Members of active publics, affect organizations more than passive ones because they engage in individual behaviors to do something about the consequence of organizational actions” (p. 137). If an organization can identify these groups it can attempt to dispel or counteract damaging behaviors.

Issues management helps remove the unexpected and sudden factors of the crisis; the situation can be defused before it occurs. Moreover, information gathered will not only allow practitioners to prepare, it will allow them the opportunity to realize and understand what preparations they cannot make. “Nothing prepares you for change better than the awareness of what you can do, and cannot do, about it” (Goodman, 2001, p. 117). The occurrence of some events is uncontrollable, thus, practitioners should shift their efforts away from preventing such events and towards weathering them. For instance, a state is aware of a hurricane days before it makes landfall. Though issues

management allows the opportunity to prepare for the possible crisis, it cannot neutralize the storm. Instead, issues management allows practitioners to prepare for the event as well as the resolution after the crisis occurs.

Howard and Mathews (2000) describe issues management as a practice that good managers have done for years; that it is a necessary part of effective planning. González-Herrero and Pratt (1996) discuss issues management as a tool to identify and anticipate potential issues before they are a threat. Thus, issues managers should be forward-thinking. The longer an organization is aware of the possible issue, the better it can prepare. Indeed, Ewing (1987) posits that issues managers should look 12 to 36 months ahead.

Issues management is often thought of as a proactive practice used to avoid a negative situation, though it can also identify positive opportunities. Practicing issues management improves an organization's awareness of its community and ways to positively involve itself. For example, an organization can improve its standing in a community by being aware of and supporting an upcoming philanthropic event. Issues management can also present organizations with an opportunity to showcase its positive practices.

Unfortunately, preparation and issues management is sometimes not sufficient to avoid a crisis. Numerous incidents illustrate that although organizations were prepared for an event, the crisis was still damaging. Examples of such scenarios can be seen in all professions: corporate, litigation, and nonprofit. Preparation, though valuable, is not a guarantee of success. The difficulties associated with a given crisis will impact the effectiveness of the preparation. Burnett (1998) presents some difficulties crisis

managers may face, they include too little data, too much data, and little planning. These variables illustrate that simply having information and early preparation may not be sufficient deterrents.

Models of Crisis Management

“The disparate volumes of crisis management information can be overwhelming” (Coombs, 1999b, 9). Certainly there are many factors a crisis management professional must account for in order to be successful. The organization of such information into a universally accepted model has presented practitioners and scholars with a challenge. Burnett (1998) identifies both tasks and factors that compromise the ability of an organization to practice crisis management (Figure 1). First, the author cited four factors that inhibit crisis management: time pressure, control issues, threat level concerns, and response option constraints. Burnett claims these factors, found on the outer-ring of the model, disrupt an organization’s ability to focus on and strategically manage a crisis situation. According to this model, only when these four factors have been addressed can the strategic management of the situation begin.

Burnett (1998) divides the model’s six step inner-circle into three categories: identification, confrontation, and reconfiguration. The identification step is composed of goal formation and environmental analysis – the preparation for the crisis. Confrontation encompasses strategy formulation and strategy evaluation – the point when an organization is involved in the crisis. Lastly, reconfiguration includes strategy implementation and strategic control – how the organization adapts to crisis intervention. The author posits that during a crisis the difficulty of performing well in each category increases. As illustrated by the model, employing the tasks that comprise the inner-circle provides the organization an opportunity to control and manage a crisis situation.

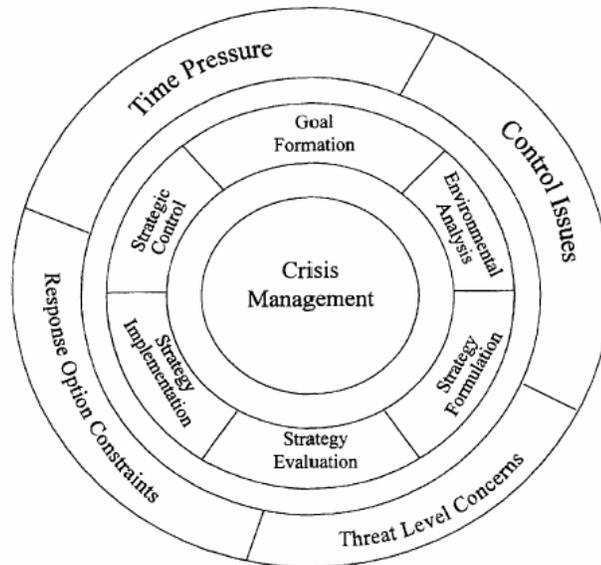


Figure 1: Crisis Management: Strategic Considerations; Adopted from Burnett (1998)

Some models make the comparison of the crisis to a lifecycle (Fink, 1986; González-Herrero & Pratt, 1996). Inherent to this analogy is that the crisis has both a birth and a death. González-Herrero and Pratt (1996) discuss how crises follow a sequential path through four phases: birth, growth, maturity and decline (Figure 2).

Although this is an elementary model of a crisis, it is sufficient. It divides a crisis into identifiable stages, it illustrates how a crisis changes over time, and that the cycle does not end, rather that its effects linger beyond the decline and death of the crisis. This basic model presents a simplistic, yet effective illustration of the crisis lifecycle.

González-Herrero and Pratt (1996) expanded this model to illustrate the effect of issues management in a crisis situation. By practicing issues management before crisis birth, the authors believe organizations can shift the outcome of the crisis (Figure 3). Previously, the crisis would have reached maturity, to eventually decline into the post-crisis phase. In this adaptation of the model, issues management is shown to be effective as the planning stage results in the prevention of a crisis.

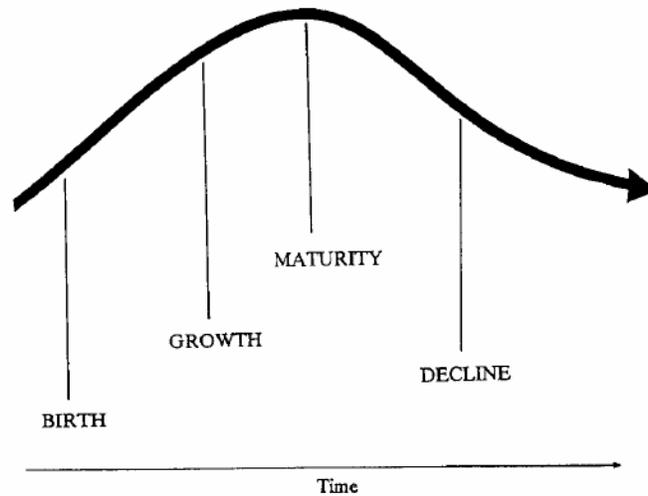


Figure 2: The Crisis Life Cycle; Adopted from González-Herrero and Pratt (1996)

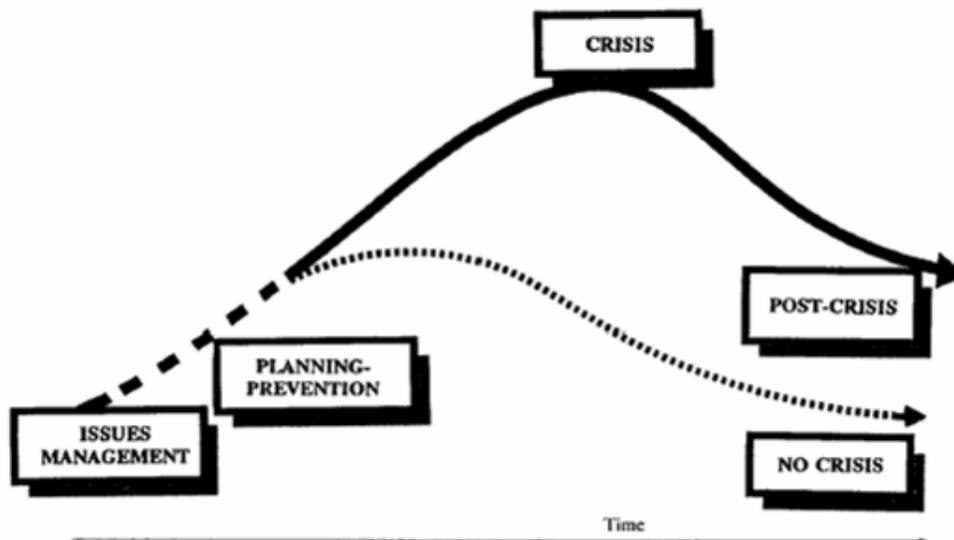


Figure 3: Development of Issues with or Without Management Intervention; Adopted from González-Herrero and Pratt (1996)

Coombs (1999b) states that the three most influential staged approaches to crisis management are Fink's (1986) four-stage model of a crisis lifecycle, Mitroff's (1994) five-stage model, and the basic three-stage model.

The three-stage model is unique in that no single scholar is attributed with its creation. "The three-stage model is not associated with any particular theorists, but it appears to have emerged from several research efforts as a general analytical framework"

(Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer, 2003, 97). Coombs (1999b) describes the three stages of the model – precrisis, crisis, and postcrisis – as macrostages that can be applied to many models of crisis management.

The precrisis stage includes all aspects of crisis prevention – issues management, planning, and other proactive steps. The crisis stage refers to the steps taken to cope with and respond to the crisis event – crisis recognition, information distribution, message development, reputation management, and evolving developments. The postcrisis stage begins when the crisis is resolved – ensuring the crisis over, assuring publics of the security of the organization, and learning from the event.

Coombs (1999b) and Seeger et al. (2003) contend that the three-stage model provides a framework for the incorporation of various sub-stages which change based on a multitude of variables. The type and impact of the crisis, media coverage of the event, and the size and culture of the affected organization can all be influential factors. Coombs explains that both Fink (1986) and Mitroff's (1994) models fit into the general parameters of the three-stage model.

Fink's (1986) four-stage model examines a crisis as an extended event with sufficient warning signs that precede the event. Fink's four stages are: the prodromal stage, the acute stage, the chronic stage, and the resolution stage. In the prodromal stage, the role of a crisis management professional is not reactive, but instead a proactive approach. In this stage, crisis managers attempt to identify an impending crisis. This information can be found in various places, such as internal and external audits, government legislation, and industry publications. Actions taken during the prodromal

stage can easily be placed into the precrisis stage of the three-stage model as they address an organization's crisis prevention.

Fink (1986) argues that the actual crisis event begins with a trigger, during what he refers to as the acute stage. This stage is characterized by the crisis event and resulting damage. The severity of the crisis and damage are influenced by the success of the prodromal stage. Successful proactive identification of a crisis can reduce the impact of the crisis in the acute stage. Failed recognition in the prodromal stage creates a reactive situation instead of a proactive intervention.

The third stage of Fink's (1986) model is the chronic stage. This stage refers to the lasting effects of the crisis. Although individual crises may occur quickly, the lasting effects of the incident can extend the lifecycle of the crisis. Additionally, this stage may include a barrage of questions about the crisis which will keep the event visible to various publics.

For example, an individual event, such as a natural disaster, may occur quickly, but the fallout of the incident may take weeks or months to repair. Individuals and organizations in Florida are still recovering from the 2004 hurricane season. More recently, entire countries are still dealing with the massive damage and loss of life caused by a tsunami that struck areas of Southeast Asia December 26, 2004. Coombs (1999b) states that the acute and chronic stages act as sub-stages of the crisis stage of the three-stage model. These stages include the appearance of a crisis and the steps taken to resolve the crisis event, characteristics which are found in the crisis stage of the three-stage model.

The final stage in Fink's (1986) model is the resolution stage. This stage identifies a clear end to the crisis. Although organizations view this as the goal, it is not one to be rushed to. An organization's premature conclusion that the chronic stage has ended can leave them vulnerable to the resurgence of the crisis. Due diligence in the previous stages of the model must be practiced to insure such a regression does not occur. This last stage of Fink's model parallels the postcrisis stage of the three-stage model as it ensures the crisis has ended and distributes that message.

The resolution stage does neglect one portion of the three-stage model. Fink does not discuss crisis management as a cyclical process. This is seen as one of the oversights of the model, that what was learned from a previous crisis is not expressly discussed in planning for future crises.

Mitroff (1994) developed a model that divides crisis management into five stages: signal detection, probing and prevention, damage containment, recovery, and learning. The segmentation of the crisis parallels Fink's (1986) discussion of the crisis lifecycle as well as the three-stage model.

The first two stages – signal detection and probing and prevention – encompass the proactive steps an organization can take before a crisis event. Signal detection identifies the signs of possible crises within an organization. Signal detection is much like Fink's (1986) prodromal stage. Probing and prevention though is not addressed in Fink's model. This stage features members of an organization seeking known crises and determining ways to prevent them. While Fink implies that crises can be prevented, Mitroff's (1994) model actively tries to prevent crises (Coombs, 1999b). As with Fink's

prodromal stage, signal detection and probing and prevention exemplify the characteristics of the precrisis stage.

The last three stages of Mitroff's (1994) model – damage containment, recovery, and learning – feature slight variations from Fink's (1986) acute, chronic, and resolution stages. Like Fink, Mitroff's stages discuss the trigger and containment of the crisis event, the arduous task of returning to the pre-crisis norm, and the resolution of the crisis event. Damage containment, like Fink's chronic stage, focuses on the steps taken following the crisis event. A relationship can be made between damage containment and the crisis stage of the three-stage model as they both involve actions taken in response to the event. The differences between Fink and Mitroff's models are found in the recovery and learning stages.

First, in the recovery stage Mitroff (1994) emphasizes the facilitation of the organizational recovery whereas in the chronic stage, Fink (1986) states that organizations recover at varying rates. Mitroff emphasizes opportunities to empower crisis managers in a particular crisis event while Fink focuses only on the timeframe of the recovery. As with damage containment, a relationship can be made between Mitroff's recovery stage and the crisis stage of the three-stage model. As in the crisis stage, during the recovery stage the organization works toward the eventual end of the crisis.

The second difference is that Mitroff's (1994) model is cyclical. The learning stage allows an organization to incorporate what it has learned from the crisis into its organizational philosophy. Fink's model simply states that resolution occurs when the crisis is no longer a concern with no mention of future applications. Mitroff's discussion

attorney's representation of a client. The inference is that an organization that aligns with the advocacy end of the continuum will maintain its stance with minimal wavering.

An activist group is one such organization that could be found at the pure advocacy end of the continuum. Activist groups are characterized by strong beliefs in a particular issue; they use a variety of methods to convince others that their beliefs are correct.

Activists are also unlikely to waver unless the status of their cause is improved. L.

Grunig et al. (2002) defined an activist group as,

A group of two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion, pressure tactics, or force. (p. 446)

The accommodation half of the continuum is quite different (Cancel et al., 1997).

It illustrates an organization's ability to work with publics in an attempt to build trust and understanding. Depending on the role of the public relations practitioner,

accommodation may prove difficult. In most organizations the dominant coalition determines the stance of the entire organization. If the organization is structured so that public relations practitioners do not have access to the dominant coalition, practitioners may be unable to convince the organization to change its stance for a single public. L.

Grunig et al. (2002) explained that public relations departments must have access to the dominant coalition in order to contribute to strategic management and planning.

The choice to accommodate a public may involve a small change in policy or, in some cases, a change in organizational character that may be necessary in a given situation. Moreover, the resultant relationship from accommodation could prove valuable in the event of a future dispute or crisis. It is at this meeting point on the continuum that effective communication occurs.

Criticisms of Contingency Theory

J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) identified the four models of public relations: press agency, public information model, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical. These were the initial models developed for the field of public relations. As a result, the models were the subject of criticism from public relations scholars. The contingency theory is one of many theories that expand these models.

Of the four models, the two-way symmetrical model of communication has received the greatest attention. Indeed, J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1992) stated that this was both a descriptive and normative model. They believe that two-way communication between an organization and its publics epitomizes the ideal practice of public relations.

J. Grunig (2001) stated that a dialogue must be initiated in order to determine the stance of the individual public, "...neither side can really know the morality or reasonableness of the other side's interests without talking with its representatives" (p. 15). The author further posits that accommodative techniques should only be used during this conversation. Only upon a failed attempt to accommodate does Grunig explain, "...the symmetrical approach suggests that advocacy of [one side's] interests or withdrawal from the dialogue is ethically reasonable" (p. 16).

Two-way symmetrical communication, though, may not always be feasible as Cancel et al. (1999) stated in paraphrasing Cancel et al. (1997) "a monolithic approval of two-way symmetrical public relations is not sustainable given numerous publics—nor likely to lead to effective public relations" (p. 178).

Thomas and Kilmann (1974) discussed the dimension of negotiation within the Dual Concern Model as a "party's desire for own concern" and "party's desire to satisfy other's concern." The balance of the Dual Concern Model is what Thomas and Kilmann

referred to as the compromise stage. In this stage, the organization's concerns – the points they advocate – influence negotiation, and ultimately the level of accommodation. Moreover, it is incorrect to assume that an organization can completely abandon their stance when attempting to accommodate a public, especially as they remain accountable to other internal and external publics.

More on Advocacy

The description of an activist group by L. Grunig et al. (2002) supports the very notion of the contingency theory of accommodation. The authors established that an activist group can consist of two or more individuals. This factor will greatly influence how much a company accommodates the particular situation.

Consider the request of a small, unknown activist group to meet with a large company to discuss possible changes in the company's environmental policy. Company managers agreeing to meet with the group is unlikely, based solely on the activist group's lack of stature. If managers of a large company were to meet with every activist group, there would be little time to run the company. They would need an overwhelming reason to hold the meeting. Secondly, if in fact the two individuals were granted the meeting, their lack of prominence as an activist group would minimize the reverence they garner. Though the organization has met with them, the individuals would need to be extremely convincing to receive significant accommodation.

The reason is simple. In order to accommodate requests, the company may need to make concessions that could be detrimental; profit margins could drop, jobs could be lost, or business relationships could dissolve. A company has to weigh this effect on other stakeholders and whether it will risk these negatives to fulfill the need of a small public.

Likewise, failure to accommodate could prove detrimental. The backlash from maintaining an organizational position could be hurtful. If the concerns of a group are reasonable and they are ignored, the repercussions could be damaging.

If it was determined that accommodating the activist group proved too costly, the organization would remain at the advocacy end of the continuum, though the position could shift. If before the meeting the organization was positioned at “pure advocacy,” it may shift slightly toward the accommodation end. This could be the result of agreeing to future meetings or other small concessions. If no such concessions were made, the organizational position would remain at pure advocacy.

More on Accommodation

The activist example serves to also explore the concept of accommodation. In the previous scenario the company was unlikely to practice accommodation with the two-person activist group based on the cost-benefit of doing so. Conversely, when the activist is a large and very reputable group, a company will be more likely to consider accommodation.

For instance, as stated on its Web site, the Sierra Club is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The organization boasts 700,000 members. By contrasting the Sierra Club with the two-person activist group that wants to protect the environment, it is clear that the response would be very different.

If a company were approached to discuss an environmental policy, the clout of the Sierra Club would increase the likelihood of the meeting. The company would have to weigh the same factors it did for the two-person activist example, though in this case the public is much different. The influence of an organization such as the Sierra Club is large. The company must be aware that the numerous members could have a sufficient

impact on its product or service. Demonstrations, boycotts, and media coverage could all affect the success of the company. The severity of these events could prove very costly.

In the previous example, the organization was unlikely to accommodate due to the cost-benefit ratio. In this case though, the cost of not accommodating could be much larger. The company would weigh these new variables to make a decision to accommodate some of the Sierra Club's requests. In doing so, the company reduces the risk of retribution, improves its relationship with the Sierra Club, and aligns itself with an organization with a positive reputation.

Contingency Variables

The contingency theory of accommodation identified 86 variables that could influence an organization's level of accommodation. Cancel, Mitrook, and Cameron (1999) tested the theory and variables to determine those that were most relevant. In a qualitative study, researchers interviewed 18 public relations practitioners to determine "whether the contingency theory makes sense to them" (Cancel et al., 1999, p. 172). Interview participants worked for nationwide corporations and each had between 20 and 40 years of experience.

The study's findings divided the variables into two major groups, predisposing and situational variables. Each group consisted of variables that were found to be "highly supported" by the practitioners (Cancel et al., 1999). Examination of these variables will provide knowledge pertinent to ground crisis management in the contingency theory.

Predisposing variables

Cancel et al. (1999) define predisposing variables as "those variables which have their greatest influence on an organization by helping to shape the organization's predisposition towards relations with external publics" (p. 177). These variables are part

of the foundation of a company. They are steadfast characteristics that define what the corporation stands for; they give the company a personality. In their study, Cancel et al. (1999) found that, “predisposing variables influence location along the continuum before the corporation enters into a particular situation involving an external public” (p. 190).

From the interviews, Cancel et al. (1999) identified five highly-supported-predisposing variables: (a) corporation business exposure, (b) public relations access to dominant coalition, (c) dominant coalition’s decision power and enlightenment, (d) corporate size, and (e) individual characteristics of involved persons. These variables will be examined further in this study. Though future research exploring contingency theory may examine all of the predisposing variables, this study will focus on only those variables identified by Cancel et al. (1999) as highly-supported. By examining these variables the researcher attempts to support previous findings. The goal is a structured analysis of crisis management utilizing the framework of the contingency theory.

Corporation business exposure was cited as influential to relations with external publics in 13 of the 18 interviews (Cancel et al., 1999). Researchers discovered that participants whose company produces consumer or necessary goods needed to be very responsive to their publics. Moreover, companies that produce consumer products were also found to have greater exposure to publics than companies in the commercial or industrial markets. Respondents believe that as a result of the higher exposure, these companies’ expectation to accommodate to publics was higher.

Public relations access to dominant coalition “enthusiastically” received support in all interviews as influential of how organizations deal with their publics (Cancel et al., 1999). Respondents explained that the dominant coalition had the final say in what was

allocated to publics. This supports a common theme explained by Grunig and Grunig (1992) and a belief of practitioners and scholars alike: public relations must have a place in the dominant coalition. Participants explained that they were used as an advisor to management about opportunities to accommodate publics, but felt that in order to be successful they required access. L. Grunig et al. (2002) also supports the findings of Cancel et al. (1999) that the structure of the public relations department influences access to the dominant coalition. The authors posit that when public relations is autonomous from other departments, such as marketing, their access to the dominant coalition increases allowing for a greater examination of public relations issues.

Dominant coalition's decision power and enlightenment takes the variable of access to the dominant coalition one step further. This variable was cited most often by interview subjects as influential (Cancel et al, 1999). Subjects agreed that the dominant coalition must understand the importance and value of public relations to the organization. Many practitioners explained that there were times they had to educate management about their role and value.

Corporate size was cited by many subjects as causing high visibility (Cancel et al, 1999). As found in the variable of business exposure, high visibility can lead to the expectation that a company will be accommodative. Also, respondents explained they felt the size of their companies made them targets of activist groups. As discussed earlier, special interest and activist groups can influence the accommodative practices of a company. Subjects also stated that a large corporation could have so many diverse publics that they cannot respond to all of them.

Individual characteristics of involved persons was mentioned by 15 of the 18 respondents as influential to relations with external publics (Cancel et al., 1999). The individuals referred to were members of the dominant coalition, not public relations managers. This variable also illustrates how important it is for public relations to be included in the dominant coalition. Specific characteristics mentioned were open-mindedness, the ability to screen out personal bias, and past training and education.

Situational variables

Situational variables, as defined by Cancel et al. (1999), “are the specific and often changing dynamics at work during particular situations involving an organization and an external public” (p. 177). These variables present a great challenge to crisis managers as they appear only as the crisis presents itself. As the authors explained, these variables impact an organization’s position “as the situation plays out” (p. 177).

Thus, these variables appear during or immediately following a crisis and exert their influence on the predisposing variables. The situational variables can largely impact the position of a company along the contingency continuum. Whereas the company’s predisposing variables may place it on the advocacy end of the continuum, a powerful situational variable could shift that position. For instance, an automobile company may claim its new sport utility vehicle is safe. If an independent safety test shows the SUV has the propensity to flip when drivers are forced to swerve at high speeds, the threat to the company could result in a shift from advocacy of their safety stance to accommodation of new safety recommendations.

Cancel et al. (1999) identified five situational variables as receiving high support from respondents: (a) urgency of situation, (b) characteristics of external public’s claims

or requests, (c) characteristics of external public, (d) potential or obvious threats, and (e) potential cost or benefit for a corporation from choosing various stances.

Urgency of situation was cited in all interviews and strongly associated with influencing the accommodation of an external public (Cancel et al, 1999). Many respondents stated that this variable must be established soon after determining the specific details of an incident. The degree of urgency in a given situation is based on a number of factors; internal, external, and predisposing factors can influence the level of urgency. These variable factors support the notion that not all situations are similar and practitioners must be prepared to react differently in each situation.

Characteristics of external public's claims or requests were among the most frequently mentioned variables (Cancel et al, 1999). Participants stated that the perception of the external publics' claim or request influence how they proceeded. Truth or falsity, as well as the existence of responsibility for the negative claim held an important role in the decision to accommodate. In addition, the reasonability of a claim also influenced accommodation. If a claim or request is reasonable, corporations were found to be more accommodative.

Characteristics of external public refers to the corporation's interaction with and perceptions of an external public. The characteristic most frequently noted in interviews was how well the public could affect the company's ability to do business and make money, positively or negatively (Cancel et al., 1999). Respondents also cited the public's size, organization, and ability to garner media coverage as characteristics they weigh. Indeed, the capabilities of external publics can influence the decision to accommodate an external public.

Potential or obvious threats were cited in all interviews as a factor the practitioners faced at one point (Cancel et al, 1999). A larger threat was associated with a quicker response and higher likelihood to accommodate. The threat level can be associated to a number of factors including the power of the external public. A powerful public presents a greater threat to a company as it has greater resources and capabilities at its disposal. Possible media coverage was the most frequently cited threat, though the threat of economic loss was underlying to each threat. One practitioner explained that impacting a company's ability to do business and make a profit is a quintessential piece of a threat.

Potential cost or benefit is fundamental in business. In regard to the contingency theory, cost-benefit is how a company's position along the continuum affects its costs and benefits. For instance, if accommodating an external public will be a costly pursuit, the company must determine if the benefits will counteract some of the expense. Benefits of accommodation include improved public perception, alignment with a positive organization, and the development of an advantageous relationship. Not surprisingly, the subjects explained their company strives for a situation with the lowest cost and highest benefit (Cancel et al., 1999).

The researcher believes that the highly-supported-predisposing and situational variables will likely have a role in crisis management. In an attempt to illustrate the relationship between these variables and the three-stage model of crisis management, four research questions have been developed to guide the study:

- RQ1: How will the predisposing variables emerge from the three-stage model of crisis management?

- RQ2: How will the situational variables emerge from the three-stage model of crisis management?
- RQ3: At what point in the model will the predisposing variables emerge from the three-stage model of crisis management?
- RQ4: At what point in the model will the situational variables emerge from the three-stage model of crisis management?

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Review of Research Questions

Four research questions were developed to test the influence of contingency variables on a crisis situation. The research questions will provide a groundwork that demonstrates the use of contingency theory in crisis management practice. The study first examined whether the contingency theory variables identified by Cancel et al. (1999) as highly-supported emerged during crisis management. The study then attempted to determine at what point those variables affected crisis management.

Questions one and two examine the role of the highly-supported-predisposing and situational variables in a crisis. Questions three and four study at what point the highly-supported-predisposing and situational variables influence crisis management.

- RQ1: Will the predisposing variables emerge from the three-stage model of crisis management?
- RQ2: Will the situational variables emerge from the three-stage model of crisis management?
- RQ3: At what point in the model might the predisposing variables emerge from the three-stage model of crisis management?
- RQ4: At what point in the model might the situational variables emerge from the three-stage model of crisis management?

Data Collection

Data collection for this study used a modified Delphi technique. This qualitative interactive research method allowed the researcher to gather a great deal of information from individuals with exceptional knowledge about a subject (Clare, 1994). The

technique allowed the researcher to prompt participants with a question. Upon receipt of all answers, the researcher posed a supporting question based on the initial findings for the panel to respond. The process served as a way to structure group communication (Turoff & Hiltz, 1996).

Beyond the receipt of individual feedback, the Delphi technique allowed respondents to react to their colleagues while guaranteeing anonymity. Responses were not immediately provided to all of the participants. During analysis of the responses to determine a follow-up question, the researcher removed any information that may have identified the respondent in the answer.

The Delphi system allowed for geographically distributed individuals to interact while discussing their crisis management experiences. Moreover, this technique helped remove negative dynamics that may inhibit communication in a group setting, such as hostility toward other participants and domination of the discussion by a participant (Clare, 1994; Wakefield, 2000).

A limitation of the Delphi technique is that participants needed to be reminded and motivated to provide feedback. Whereas in interviews the researcher is present to ensure respondent interaction, the Delphi method only allowed interaction along mediated channels. In an attempt to maintain participation, the researcher sent periodic reminder e-mails and made telephone calls to participants who did not respond to the question by the requested deadline.

The questions examined the role that predisposing and situational variables have in the crisis management process and attempted to determine other variables that influenced the respondents' crisis response. Respondents were asked to discuss those variables

which most influenced their crisis management response. The researcher prompted the respondents with questions that addressed the predisposing and situational variables that the participants did not discuss. Variables mentioned by the subjects that were not highly-supported by Cancel et al. (1999) were also documented.

Sample

The study used a purposive sample of communication experts from municipal utility companies in the state of Florida. The municipal utilities companies recruited for this study were electric companies that are community-owned and locally managed. The effects of the very active, 2004 hurricane season on the state of Florida supports the belief that these individuals have experience in natural disaster, crisis situations and related communication functions.

Candidates for participation in this study included a cross-section of municipal utility companies throughout the state of Florida. The study aimed to target local level, senior members of the Florida municipal utility community. Contact information for senior members at the various organizations was provided by Florida Municipal Energy Association (FMEA) Executive Director, Barry Moline.

Following a phone call placed to Mr. Moline discussing the study, the researcher was provided with six senior individuals at municipal utilities across the state of Florida that were impacted by the 2004 hurricane season.

The six organizational contacts were sent an initial recruitment e-mail in early January, 2005 (APPENDIX A). A follow-up telephone call was made to those candidates who did not respond within one week. Initially, five of the six individuals agreed to participate in the study – the sixth candidate explained his organization was still too busy with recovery efforts from the hurricane season to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

The findings were analyzed to determine the role of predisposing and situational variables in crisis management. Throughout the research process data was analyzed in order to generate follow-up questions for participants. The analysis followed the constant comparative method. The individual responses were compared to reveal the common themes presented by participants. Information that did not support the categorization of the highly-supported-predisposing and situational variables was documented.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data collection occurred over a six-week period. From the original five participants, three remained at the end of the study. Two of the three participants responded to all phases of the study. The third individual was unable to participate in phase 1.1 but responded to each subsequent phase.

Of the two individuals who withdrew from participation, both expressed a lack of time to dedicate to the study while in the first phase. One participant withdrew before responding to the first primary question while the other withdrew after responding to the first primary question. In each phase of the study, the researcher received responses from three participants. Participants were informed to use the 2004 hurricane season or a particular storm from that hurricane season that affected their organization as the basis of their response.

The background of the participants was quite different. Two of the three participants are employed by small city governments while the third worked for a utility company servicing a large city. The individual who withdrew after answering the first primary question worked for a utility company in a small city. Responses from each participant are reflected in the analysis of each phase of the study.

Phase 1

Phase 1 of the study was developed to expose a possible relationship between the highly-supported-predisposing variables identified by Cancel et al. (1999) and the precrisis stage of the three-stage crisis management model. The highly-supported-

predisposing variables are corporate business exposure, public relations access to the dominant coalition, the dominant coalition's decision power and enlightenment, corporate size, and the individual characteristics of involved persons. Phase 1 provided data that allows the researcher to answer the first and third research questions of this study:

- RQ1: How will the predisposing variables emerge from the three-stage model of crisis management?
- RQ3: At what point in the model will the predisposing variables emerge from the three-stage model of crisis management?

The data suggest that the predisposing variables do influence crisis management.

Each respondent addressed the role of the variables, to some degree, in their organization.

Discussion centered on how the predisposing variables influenced the preparatory actions of participant organizations and the established role of participants in organizational decision-making. Moreover, there was a relationship between participant responses regarding the predisposing variables and the precrisis stage of the three-stage model. The precrisis stage addresses the proactive steps an organization takes to avoid a crisis. Likewise, in phase 1 the respondents discussed the existence of the predisposing variables prior to the crisis event.

Phase 1.1

The first question was meant to determine what precrisis infrastructure existed at each respondent's organization. The phase 1.1 question read: "What preparatory steps has your organization taken in an attempt to avoid a crisis event?"

The question was purposefully vague as to not influence the responses of participants, but rather to gauge the relevance of varying facets of their crisis response. The purpose was for those items they viewed as most important to surface in the

responses. Participants seeking further clarification were provided an addendum to phase 1.1 asking the respondents to discuss the characteristics of their organization that shape its crisis response.

Phase 1.1 responses dealt with the proactive steps taken for a crisis event. Preparation of various crisis plans and manuals had been completed by all respondents. Participants 1 and 3 discussed the impact of the September 11, 2001 attacks on their crisis preparation. Each participant stated that since the attacks there has been a new emphasis on the security of their facilities. Participants 1 and 2 discussed the use of government sanctioned training or meetings to support crisis preparation. All three participants discussed the importance of public safety.

The highly-supported-predisposing variables played only a minor role in phase 1.1. However, one participant did address two of them in their response. Participant 3 discussed the variables corporate size and access to the dominant coalition. In this industry corporate size is determined by the number of clients serviced – a greater demand for power necessitates a larger organization. This participant stated that only after power outages dropped below a “reasonable number” did twice daily briefings cease. The reasonable number of outages was 40,000. This figure is a reflection of the company’s size as it can service up to this number of outages without the implementation of increased protocols.

This supports the findings of Cancel et al. (1999) that the size of an organization influences its ability to accommodate its publics. This large utility company was able to accommodate a large number of outages before enacting new protocols. A smaller organization would not be able to handle such a large number of outages with the same

ease. Whereas the large utility may not deviate from normal protocol, the smaller organization may have to alter its communication response and community information efforts. Participant 2 is a member of a seven person team that oversees power distribution activities (Appendix G). For a workforce of this size, implementation of special operations would have likely occurred well before 40,000 outages. Therefore, there is support that corporate size influences the precrisis stage of the three-stage model.

Additionally, access to the dominant coalition was addressed briefly in phase 1.1. Participant 3 explained that following the massive outages, twice daily briefings were held to address the situation. Many departments, including communications, were represented in the meetings

[The meetings] involved the CEO, the Electric, Water and Sewer Operations Department, Internal and External Communications, Public Outreach, Facilities Maintenance, Client Relationships, Security, Finance, Risk Management, Safety, Engineering, Technology Services, and Governmental Relations. All vice presidents on the executive management team were at the meetings, along with many of the field operations supervisors to ensure direct information flow from the field. (Appendix F)

Public relations practitioners in this organization – internal and external communication, public outreach, client relationships, and government relations – all had access to the dominant coalition. Though it is unclear whether this access is permitted when the organization is not facing a crisis, the inclusion of public relations in discussions about crises identifies the active role the department has within the organization. The amount of access public relations has to the dominant coalition in this organization supports the study of Cancel et al. (1999) as well as the variable's influence on the crisis stage of the three-stage model. The access of public relations and the size of the organization are discussed further in the analysis of phase 1.2.

Phase 1.2

Phase 1.2 delved into the participant's role in the organization. The researcher wanted to learn how their ideas were incorporated into the organization's decision-making process. Additionally, the question attempted to determine the other sources of information the dominant coalition recognized. The phase 1.2 question read: "How has your input been incorporated into your organization's current crisis management protocols? Who else's input, internal or external, was taken into account?"

This question attempted to elicit responses addressing multiple variables identified in the contingency theory. As mentioned, organizational size was found to be an influential variable in phase 1.2. Unlike the phase 1.1 response, participant 2 is from "a very small organization" (Appendix G).

The participant explained one objective the organization recognized was the need to educate the public about crisis situations. The small size of the organization necessitated support from local agencies – police, fire, and emergency management – to successfully educate the public. Without external support the smaller organization may not have been able to address the needs of their public. As in phase 1.1, the predisposing variable of corporate size identified by Cancel et al. (1999) is supported. The organization's small size influenced its ability to provide publics with important information in the precrisis stage.

Moreover, the size of the organization also influenced access to the dominant coalition. Participant 2 explained that the department that handled power-related issues consisted of seven individuals, "1 superintendent, 3 linemen, 2 apprentices, plus me" (Appendix G). As a result of the small department, input from all individuals – including

the respondent who frequently serves as city spokesperson for public services – was included in the decision-making process.

Lastly, this organization also supported the notion that characteristics of involved individuals influence the precrisis stage. Respondent 2 explained that although everyone's suggestions were encouraged, the more experienced individuals were able to provide greater insight. It is likely that an individual in a small department with more experience will influence the choices made in crisis preparation. This experience relates to discussion in Cancel et al. (1999) of past training or education as a characteristic frequently mentioned by respondents, as influential to the organization's accommodation of publics.

Phase 1 Conclusion

Phase 1 identified support for the predisposing variables of corporate size, public relations access to the dominant coalition, and individual characteristics of involved persons. There was only marginal support for the variables of dominant coalition enlightenment and corporate business exposure.

In phases 1.1 and 1.2 respondents addressed the importance of public safety, government training courses, and resource availability as well as highly-supported-predisposing variables cited by Cancel et al. (1999). In order for these opportunities to be available for public relations practitioners, it is likely that both funding and support of the dominant coalition were achieved. This likelihood provides marginal support for dominant coalition enlightenment of the role of public relations. Additionally, corporate business exposure was not directly mentioned as influential to crisis preparation, though public access to the organization and visibility in the media were addressed once the crisis occurred and will be discussed in the analysis of phase 2.

Phase 1 also included some support for a contingency variables not highly-supported in Cancel et al. (1999). The role of legal counsel in crisis preparation was addressed by one respondent. In phase 1.1 the respondent explained that full-time general counsel was hired in 2002 to aid in crisis preparedness. This individual's role was to assist in the proactive identification of organizational vulnerabilities. This was the only mention of legal counsel throughout the study.

Phase 2

The second phase of the study transitioned to examine the relationship between the highly-supported-situational variables identified by Cancel et al. (1999) and the crisis stage of the three-stage model. The highly-supported-situational variables are: urgency of the situation, characteristics of external public's claims or requests, characteristics of external publics, potential or obvious threats, and the potential cost or benefit of a particular action. The data collected in phase 2 provided the researcher with information to answer the second and fourth research questions of this study:

- RQ2: How will the situational variables emerge from the three-stage model of crisis management?
- RQ4: At what point in the model will the situational variables emerge from the three-stage model of crisis management?

In this phase, the data illustrated the role of the situational variables in crisis management. Participant responses focused on the existence of the situational variables relative to the crisis event – the discussion addressed the organizational response to the crisis as well as the factors that influenced the response. In many cases, the situational variables provided insight as to why the organizations responded in a particular manner. Participants often addressed their organization's response to the crisis when commenting on the role of the situational variables. The discussion of the variables' influence

concentrated on the crisis stage of three-stage model. As a result, the researcher can infer that the situational variables exert influence in the crisis stage of the model.

Phase 2.1

The question in phase 2.1 identified the variables that influenced organizational response to the 2004 hurricane season – referred to as the crisis event. The phase 2.1 question read: “What characteristics of the crisis event influence your organization’s crisis response?”

The characteristics of external publics’ claims and requests was an influential variable in phase 2.1. Respondents 2 and 3 explained that their organizations received a lot of pressure from publics to restore power. Respondent 3 explained that with more than half of their customers without power, the company received as many calls in one day as they typically do in a month. Considering the number of phone calls the organization had to modify how they communicated with publics and the media. The organization’s “blast fax” to the media and members of the city council helped the organization distribute information to the public (Appendix H). Thus, the number of requests for service influenced this organization’s response in the crisis stage of the three-stage model.

The variable of corporate size was revisited in conjunction with the claims and requests of publics. Participant 3 explained that once outages were reduced to a manageable amount the use of blast faxes ceased and the organization returned to its normal communicative practices. As addressed in phase 1, the number of manageable outages was 40,000. A smaller organization may not consider that number of outages low enough to resume normal protocols. Respondent 4 works for a much smaller organization and explained that due to its size, the organization was forced to work

closely with the county emergency management team to restore power. The crisis stage of the three-stage model concludes when the crisis ends. Though a reduction to 40,000 outages did not end the crisis, an organization's size and ability to handle a large volume of outages will expedite the crisis stage.

Public outcry supports the existence of another situational variable's role in the crisis stage of the three-stage model – potential cost or benefit. Again, respondents 2 and 3 explained that as a result of the massive power outages their organization was forced to determine the best way to restore power. Each respondent explained that they organized repairs from the power source and major power lines to the neighborhoods in order to most efficiently restore power to the most people. This sequence did not follow standard procedure – in fact it was the exact opposite in one case. The organization determined the cost of following standard protocol was too high – it would have taken too long to restore power – and that a different approach produced a greater benefit in the situation.

Additionally, respondent 2 briefly discussed that there was great importance placed on restoration of power to critical facilities. The need to restore power to these facilities quickly relates with the variables of urgency of the situation and potential and obvious threats. Medical facilities need power to provide treatment for patients. Without power, patients may not be able to receive care – in some cases urgent, lifesaving care. Moreover, it is likely that these facilities received an increase in patients as a result of the storm, thus power restoration was essential. These variables were further addressed by respondents in phase 2.2.

Phase 2.2

Phase 2.2 further examined a point raised in phase 2.1. As a result of the power outages many publics contacted or attempted to contact their utility provider. This phase

asked if any particular public contacted the organization more than others. The phase 2.2 question read, “Were certain publics more vocal regarding their need for power restoration? Did their requests influence your organization’s response?”

This question directly addressed the situational variable of characteristic of an external public. The responses to this question varied, as each respondent had a different experience with the distinguishing characteristics. Participant 2 explained the most vocal group in the community belonged to a more affluent, gated community who felt they were not receiving the service they deserved. The respondent explained that only rarely did any calls influence power restoration procedure. Instead, the organization prioritized restoration from important community services down to individual members of the community. There were a few instances where external publics affected restoration. These situations were limited to unknown critical needs facilities and “quick easy fixes that would restore power to many customers” (Appendix I). Thus, certain characteristics of external publics and the cost-benefit of “quick fixes” influenced this organization’s response in the crisis stage.

Respondent 3 stated that parents became most vocal in the days following a power outage. Parents with jobs had to stay home to watch their children or were forced to pay for daycare due to school closures. Additionally, some parents contacted city council members and the mayor in an attempt to expedite school power restoration. The pressure from this public placed more focus on school restoration. Support is again found for the Cancel et al. (1999) variable, characteristics of external publics. Outcry for a focus of restoration efforts at school proved successful in shifting focus to that task.

Participant 4 explained that calls requesting power came from all members of the community. The first groups to have power restored were the police, fire, and emergency services followed by downtown businesses and medical facilities. Again, characteristics of the public influence the crisis response. Those services and facilities that were deemed most important to receive power restoration were addressed first. In reference to the general public, the respondent claimed that no group influenced their response. Instead, power restoration crews were dispatched in order of request.

Phase 2 Conclusion

Phase 2 identified much support for the Cancel et al. (1999) highly-supported-situational variables – each variable was addressed by respondents. The variable most supported was characteristics of external publics. Each respondent explained that certain publics – medical facilities, schools, or emergency services – received a greater amount of organizational resources. The variable which received the least support was potential or obvious threats. The only relationship with this variable can be with the threat of not immediately restoring power to medical facilities or emergency services.

Additionally, the applications of lessons learned during this crisis were briefly discussed in phase 2. Participant 2 explained that his organization “insert[s] lessons learned as needed to our preparations” (Appendix H). Participant 3 discussed how his organization “develop[ed] a contact/location list for all schools we serve” (Appendix I). These two tasks support the premise of the three-stage model that crisis management is cyclical. Lessons learned during one crisis should be included in future crisis management planning and preparation so as to avoid or reduce the risk of another crisis. The application of lessons learned during a crisis will be discussed further in the analysis of phase 3.

Phase 3

The third phase of this study did not serve to relate the contingency theory with the three-stage model. Instead, this phase examined whether the participants' crisis management practices are cyclical. The three-stage model is a cyclical model of crisis management – it explains that what an organization learns during a crisis should be applied to future crisis events. The researcher wanted to probe whether or not participants practiced cyclical crisis management and how it affected their attitudes regarding possible future crises. Unexpectedly, the data presented a reemergence of the predisposing variables. As a result, phase three of the study also, like phase one, served to answer the first and third research questions.

Phase 3.1

The phase 3.1 question examined what influence the 2004 hurricane season had on the future of the organization. The question read: “How did the 2004 hurricane season influence your organization’s preparation for future crises?”

Respondents discussed a variety of topics. Respondent 2 emphasized the importance of the experience his organization gained. The participant expressed that this experience would reduce the need for future “reinvention” of techniques and policies (Appendix J). Moreover, the individual explained the role interaction with other organizations played in their learning. This point was echoed by participant 4 who claimed their organization “had a new understanding” of what they must prepare for in the future (Appendix J). Respondent 3 listed the major changes this crisis prompted in the organization. The list included changes in protocol, communication techniques, staff assignments, and the receipt of community feedback.

The experience gained by the respondents from the crisis event can be valuable in future crises. As a result, the highly-supported-predisposing variable, characteristics of involved persons, reemerged. The first-hand experience familiarized them with crisis management practices. The knowledge gained from this crisis event has helped prepare these individuals for future crises. Whereas before they may have never dealt with a crisis, the 2004 hurricane season likely made them more aware of such a situation and provided them with experience to react to future events.

Phase 3.2

Phase 3.2 asked if the crisis and what the organization learned from the crisis has prepared them for similar events in the future as well as what concerns still exist. The phase 3.2 questions read: “Considering what your organization learned from the 2004 hurricane season, do you feel prepared for the 2005 hurricane season? What concerns does your organization have?”

The responses to this question were mixed. Participant 3, from a large utility company, explained that the experience has prepared the organization for future events. The respondent explained that the first-hand experience was much more valuable than any drill or exercise in teaching the organization how to cope with such situations. In contrast, the participant did express concern if the community and organization were to take a direct hit from a storm. The participant stated that the additional damage and outages caused by a direct hit are of great concern to the company and the community.

Respondent 2 had quite the opposite response regarding his organization’s preparation. This individual explained that his organization does not feel completely prepared for a hurricane season. The participant cited the impact of the cost of the 2004 season on the small utility as too great to overcome in one year. As a result, this

organization will triage their needs as the 2005 hurricane season begins. This response marks the reemergence of the highly-supported-predisposing variable corporate size and illustrates how the variable will impact this organization's ability to manage a future crisis event.

Participant 4 explained that although an organization can prepare, the 2004 hurricane season was something for which you could not prepare. This individual stated that, "you may think you are prepared, but when you have three successive hurricanes wreak havoc on your community in six weeks, you can't get that prepared" (Appendix K). As a result of the 2004 hurricanes, this participant feels that hurricane season will always concern her community.

Phase 3 Conclusions

From the phase three responses, the researcher can conclude that each respondent has learned from the experience of the 2004 hurricane season and will apply those lessons to future crisis management practices. The respondents, therefore, did use a cyclical model of crisis management – a vital aspect of the three-stage model. The knowledge gained and resulting changes from the 2004 hurricane season will only increase the ability of these organizations to prepare for crisis events as well as reduce the impact of the crises.

Additionally, predisposing variables emerged in phase three responses. These variables signal the creation of the new precrisis stage that occurs when new information, gained during a crisis, is incorporated into existing precrisis protocol. The outcome of this synthesis is a new precrisis norm, exhibiting highly-supported-predisposing variables.

CHAPTER 5 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

This qualitative study does not allow the researcher to make generalizations into the relationship between the contingency theory of accommodation and crisis management practices. Moreover, the small number of participants may slightly detract from the relevance of the study. This study provides a springboard for further study. Future studies that attempt to relate the contingency theory and crisis management practices should soon transition from a qualitative approach to a quantitative methodology.

As a follow-up to this study scholars should use depth interviews to collect data in an attempt to relate the highly-supported variables identified by Cancel et al. (1999) to crisis management. The Delphi approach used in this study proved problematic at times in recruitment, sustained participation, and depth of information. Though this study did provide purposeful data, an interview format would allow the researcher the opportunity to probe each respondent further and receive greater clarification on the role of the highly-supported variables. As a result of the Delphi methodology's limited opportunity for follow-up questions, there was likely valuable information that the respondents did not convey. The depth interview will provide the wealth of knowledge that can precede a quantitative study.

Upon analysis of detailed qualitative data that supports a relationship between the contingency theory and crisis management, a quantitative study may generate statistically

relevant data. From this data, contingency theory scholars can provide crisis management practitioners with a theoretical grounding of their practice.

CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Crisis management literature is rich with models that various organizations can follow to help minimize the impact of a crisis. Each model has its individual merits, but the three-stage model of crisis management is the most widely accepted model (Coombs, 1999b; Seeger et al., 2003). The acceptance of the model is the result of its overarching applicability to a variety of organizational crisis situations. The three-stage model divides a crisis into macrostages – precrisis, crisis, and postcrisis – which allows for analysis of the event in a logical flow.

Data collection in this study was modeled after the three-stage model of crisis management. Participants responded to a series of questions which that followed the lifecycle of the crisis. The respondents, who were public relations and corporate communications practitioners at municipal utility companies in Florida, discussed their organization's crisis management practices during the 2004 hurricane season. Participant responses were analyzed with those variables that influenced the crisis management process categorized according to the three-stage model of crisis management.

The first phase of the study addressed the precrisis stage of the three-stage model. This stage is characterized by the proactive steps taken as crisis preparation of an organization – the proactive steps (Coombs, 1999b). Respondents addressed a number of variables that influenced their crisis preparation, including facility security standards, protocol changes resulting from the 9/11 attacks, and information gained from

organizational crisis management audits. Of the variables influencing this stage, the size of the organization revealed itself to be the most apparent influence cited by respondents.

The size of the participants' organization emerged as highly influential to their crisis preparation. The smaller organizations did not have the benefit of resources that available to larger utilities had. Moreover, the protocols that smaller organizations did have in place were much less effective as a result of resulting from a smaller staff, a less an inadequately equipped response network, and a much smaller operating budget. It was found that although a large organization can sustain a large number of outages (40,000), a smaller organization does not have the resources that allow it to effectively address such an outage.

The variable of corporate size was addressed by Cancel et al. (1997) in early contingency theory work. The researchers identified this variable as influential in the accommodation of publics. Moreover, corporate size was identified by Cancel et al. (1999) as a highly-supported-predisposing variable in further development and testing of the contingency theory. The discussion of this variable was the first in a series of highly-supported contingency theory variables that emerged during data collection. The emergence of this variable This served as the first indicator of a potential relationship between contingency theory variables and the three-stage model of crisis management that appeared in the data. The contingency theory variables start to emerge emerged as a way to understand the three three-stage model of crisis management. This proposition is supported by the presence of additional highly-supported contingency variables in participant responses regarding their crisis management practices.

Additional highly-supported-predisposing variables that emerged during the precrisis portion of data collection include public relations' access to the dominant coalition and the characteristics of involved persons. Participants explained that members of the public relations function of the organization were in place prior to the crisis event. Also, the predisposing variable of employment tenure within the organization emerged characteristics of involved persons emerged as participants explained that the input of the more tenured members of the organization was very valuable as a result of their greater insight into the crisis.

The appearance of these variables in the data further supports the notion that there is some a relationship between the highly-supported-predisposing variables of contingency theory and the precrisis stage of the three-stage model of crisis management. Moreover, the predisposing variables of dominant coalition power and enlightenment and organizational business exposure were also addressed by participants. Although these variables emerged to a lesser extent, their existence in the data provides supplementary support to a relationship between crisis management and the variables identified in the contingency theory.

The second phase of the study shifted question the focus to the crisis stage of the three-stage model of crisis management. The crisis phase is characterized by the crisis event and its lasting effects, and continues until the crisis has ended. Participants discussed a number of variables that influenced how their organization responded to a crisis. As was found in the precrisis question responses, highly-supported-predisposing variables from the contingency theory also emerged from in responses to crisis crisis-phase questioning.

In the crisis phase responses, highly-supported-situational variables identified by Cancel et al. (1999) emerged. The variables – characteristics of external publics, the characteristics of external publics' requests, the cost-benefit of particular actions, the urgency of the situation, and potential or obvious threats – were all addressed by respondents. Of these variables, the characteristics of external publics appeared most often. Each participant provided an example of how a particular public influenced their organization's crisis response.

The appearance of highly-supported-situational variables in the crisis phase responses, in addition to the emergence of the highly-supported-predisposing variables in the precrisis responses, strengthens the likelihood of a relationship between the contingency theory variables and the three-stage model of crisis management. Additionally, the appearance of the predisposing variables followed by the situational variables mimics the classic progression of the crisis.

The last phase of questions addressed the postcrisis stage of the three-stage model. The postcrisis stage begins once the crisis and its effects have ended and posits that organizations learn from the crisis in order to apply that knowledge to future crisis preparation. A fluid transition from the postcrisis stage to the precrisis stage occurs in the three-stage model of crisis management – the new postcrisis knowledge is synthesized with existing knowledge to become the new precrisis norm. The responses to the postcrisis phase questions examined whether the organizations practiced cyclical crisis management, if that is, whether the synthesis of new information into existing protocols occurred.

Each participant explained that the crisis event allowed their organization to learn and prepare for future crises. Respondents explained that the first-hand knowledge they received was valuable and that the knowledge they gained allowed them to update crisis protocols. Additionally, highly-supported-predisposing variables from the precrisis stage of the model reemerged in question responses to the postcrisis stage. The predisposing variables of corporate size, characteristics of involved persons, and organizational business exposure during a crisis each appeared were present in participant responses. The emergence of the predisposing variables in the postcrisis stage parallels the accepted principle that effective crisis management is a cyclical process.

The study identified a potential relationship between crisis management and the highly-supported contingency theory variables identified by Cancel et al. (1999). Figure 5 illustrates the contingency theory variables identified by respondents overlaid on the three-stage model of crisis management. Although this study cannot generate a statistical correlation between the three-stage model of crisis management and the highly-supported contingency variables identified by Cancel et al. (1999), it does identify that a potential relationship between crisis management and these variables exists. Figure 5 illustrates the emergence of contingency theory variables from the three-stage model of crisis management.

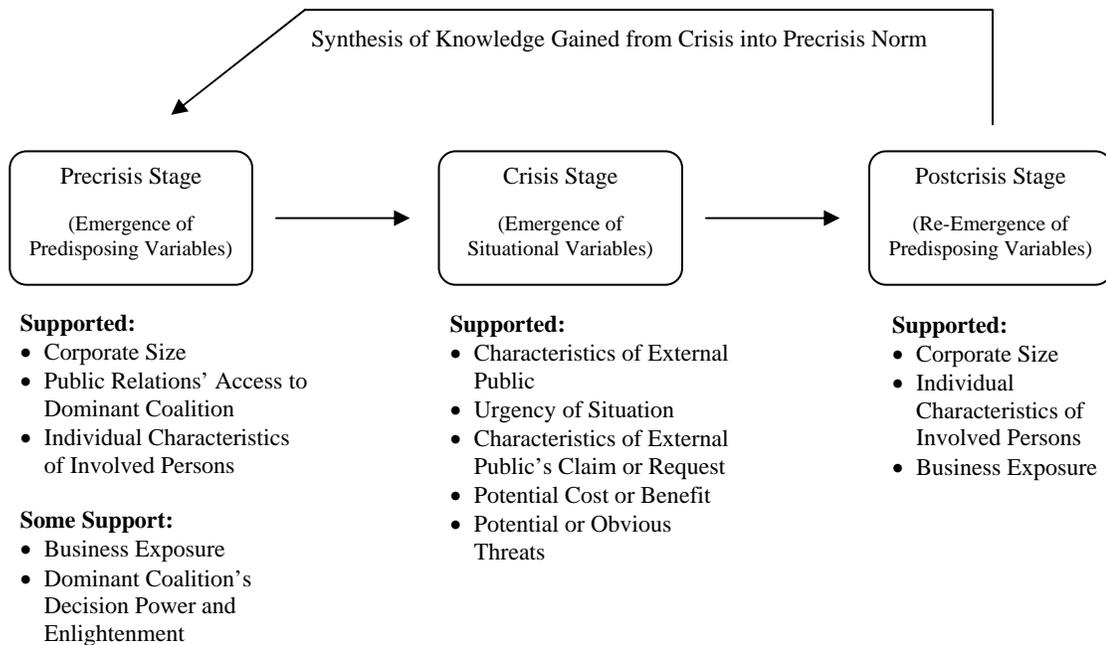


Figure 5: Contingency Variables in Crisis Management

Although this study cannot generate a statistical correlation between the three-stage model of crisis management and the highly-supported contingency theory variables, future studies that examine the three-stage model of crisis management may verify the principles that emerged in this study's findings. Additional qualitative research can provide both scholars and practitioners with a greater understanding of the relationship between crisis management and the contingency theory's highly-supported-predisposing and situational variables can be achieved through additional qualitative research. Future quantitative studies may be able to generate a statistically relevant correlation between model and theory, thereby illustrating how the three-stage model of crisis management uses the contingency theory variables to shape crisis preparation, response, and learning, may emerge from future qualitative studies of crisis management and contingency theory variables.

This researcher feels that there is a concrete link between the contingency theory of accommodation and crisis management. The highly-supported variables identified by Cancel et al. (1999) act only as a starting point for future research. This study has generated support for this belief but it has only begun to uncover the relationship between crisis management and the contingency theory variables. The opportunity to identify and define this relationship between theory and practice serves as an avenue for future public relations scholarship.

APPENDIX A
E-MAIL RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear (Participant Name):

I am a master's student in public relations at the University of Florida and am conducting my thesis on the crisis management process in Florida municipal utility companies.

The 2004 hurricane season was a blow to our state that I would like to study and learn how members of your industry reacted. As a dedicated member of this industry that serves all Floridians I was hoping you would be interested in participating in my study. I have discussed my study with FMEA Executive Director Barry Moline to help ensure meaningful findings.

The study is based on the Delphi technique. Participants will be sent questions regarding their crisis management response. Prior to the study, participants will be asked a series of questions to generate a profile of each respondent. Upon completion of the profiles, the study will then begin its three phases, each phase consisting of two questions. In each phase an initial question will be sent to participants followed by a second question based on the collective response of the participants.

The duration of the study will not exceed six weeks and will not require more than three hours of participation over that time.

The identity of participants will remain confidential throughout the process. If upon completion of the study you would like a copy of the findings I would be happy to provide them to you.

Recruitment of participants will be completed no later than January 10, 2005. Following the recruitment process you will receive the respondent profile questions and the first phase of the study. From the receipt of each phase of questions you will have one week to respond.

If you would like to participate in this study please sign the attached informed consent form and fax it to my research supervisor, Dr. Michael A. Mitrook, at (352) 392-3952. If you cannot open the attachment or have any questions please contact me at bboudreaux@jou.ufl.edu or (352) 262-1086. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brian Boudreaux

APPENDIX B
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Participant #1

1. How many years have you been involved in corporate communication? In what capacities have you done corporate communication?
 - I have 20 years of corporate communications experience, including corporate, government and nonprofit. In addition, I worked as a television new producer at Orlando's CBS affiliate.
2. In your career have you ever been faced with a crisis situation? If so, what was your role in the crisis response?
 - Yes, I have served as primary spokesman through numerous utility crises, including two Amtrak train derailments, wildfires, terrorist threats and a customer service robbery.
3. What is your current title?
 - Manager of Corporate Communications.

Participant #2

I am an engineer. I am involved in corporate communications only as a necessary function of my job. I am not formally trained in communications. My previous employer (GRU) offered communications training classes which I attended.

My current employer [City Name] has not corporate communications personnel. As the Director of Public Services, I am often required to be the City's spokesperson on Public Services related issues.

I have been involved in numerous crisis situations including last year's hurricanes which affected our area.

My current position is Director of Public Services for [City Name].

Participant #3

1. How many years have you been involved in corporate communication? In what capacities have you done corporate communication?
 - 18 years Media Relations Representation, Media Relations Manager, Public Relations Manager, and as a private consultant for seven years.
2. In your career have you ever been faced with a crisis situation? If so, what was your role in the crisis response?
 - Yes. Typically handling media relations and as an agency/organization's spokesperson with the media.
3. What is your current title?
 - Media Relations Coordinator

Participant #4

1. How many years have you been involved in corporate communication? In what capacities have you done corporate communication?
 - I have been employed for 23 years with the City of [City Name]. I started as Secretary to the City Manager in 1981 and became Deputy City Clerk in 1994. Our City is unique to just a dozen or so cities in Florida where the City Manager is also the City Clerk.
 - Each City Manager has been different regarding how much communication comes from the City Clerk.
2. In your career have you ever been faced with a crisis situation? If so, what was your role in the crisis response?
 - When Hurricane Charley blew through our town on Friday, August 13th, myself and two other city hall employees manned the darkened, power-less city hall on the following Monday, handling questions from citizens, calls from out of towners who wanted to assist in any way possible, vendors who wanted to come to our aid, emergency workers who wanted to know where to go and taking utility payments from our customers. Only the phones were worked inside city hall that day. . .power was off for days around our city. Decisions had to be made on how we could help.
3. What is your current title?
 - Deputy City Clerk

Participant #5

1. How many years have you been involved in corporate communication? In what capacities have you done corporate communication?
 - 19 years - all with municipal utilities: Memphis Light, Gas and Water Division, Ft. Pierce Utilities Authority and [Current Employer]. I have been a communications specialist, senior communications specialist, communications coordinator, manager and now, director which is part of our senior management team.
2. In your career have you ever been faced with a crisis situation? If so, what was your role in the crisis response?
 - Yes, I oversee the communications effort for these. Hurricane Jeanne and Frances are the largest. I also participated in efforts during ice storms, gas explosions and electrocution.
3. What is your current title?
 - Marketing and Communications Director

APPENDIX C
PRIMARY QUESTION FORMAT

Dear (Participant Name):

Thank you for your response to the participant profile e-mail.

This e-mail will begin the first phase of the study. The primary question is as follows:

What preparatory steps has your organization taken in an attempt to avoid a crisis event?

Please be as specific as possible when describing the safeguards your organization employs. Feel free to draw on experiences in your current position as well as identify incidents from throughout your career.

There is no minimum or maximum length requirement.

Please respond no later than Tuesday, January 18th. Once all responses have been received a compilation will be sent to you for further comment.

Sincerely,

Brian Boudreaux

APPENDIX D
FOLLOW-UP QUESTION FORMAT

Dear (Participant Name):

Thank you for your response to phase 1.1 of this study. Attached to this e-mail is a compilation of responses from all current participants. Please review the responses of your colleagues before answering:

How has your input been incorporated into your organization's current crisis management protocols? Who else's input, internal or external, was taken into account?

Please be as specific as possible in your answer. There is no minimum or maximum length requirement to your answer. Additionally, feel free to comment on any points raised by your colleagues.

Please respond with your answer no later than Wednesday, January 26th.

Sincerely,

Brian Boudreaux

APPENDIX E
SAMPLE REMINDER E-MAIL

Dear (PARTICIPANT NAME):

This e-mail is to remind you that your response to phase 2.1 is requested by Wednesday, February 2nd.

Once I have received answers from all members of the study I will distribute the responses for further comment. As always, no names of individuals or companies will appear in the responses to maintain anonymity.

If you need another copy of the question or have any other questions please contact via e-mail (bboudreaux@jou.ufl.edu) or call me at (352) 262-1086.

Sincerely,

Brian Boudreaux

APPENDIX F
PHASE 1.1 QUESTION AND RESPONSES

Phase 1.1:

What preparatory steps has your organization taken in an attempt to avoid a crisis event?

Addendum

What characteristics of your organization influence your crisis management practice?

Participant #1

[Company Name] continually looks for vulnerabilities within its organization... whether they involve infrastructure, employees and/or risk management issues. [Company Name] hired a full-time general counsel in 2002 to assist in this effort.

From a planning perspective, [Company Name] conducts an annual disaster drill that involves all employees of the utility. The purpose of the drill is to test emergency equipment, measure response time, and evaluate communication within the utility. Past drills have included a wide range of activities, including a simulation of cyber terrorism, a hazardous chemical spill, power line and substation damage, repair of utility vehicles in the field, power outages, production of sandbags at both power plants, and the testing of all emergency generators. During the drill, an evaluation team also throws out unexpected scenarios to test the readiness of utility employees.

[Company Name] has sent employees to several FEMA-sponsored training courses on disasters.

Since September 11, [Company Name] has upgraded perimeter security at its substations and power plants as well as building security at its service center and administrative offices. I.D. badges are now worn daily by all employees. [Company Name] has also purchased and installed surveillance cameras, electronic perimeter fence sensors, and proximity card readers on all exterior doors.

[Company Name] produces an annual safety calendar with safety tips to educate children on the dangers of coming into contact with electrical equipment. This is to prevent injury or death caused by electrocution. In addition, signage has been installed at all substations providing notice of high voltage.

In 2003, [Company Name] installed portable defibrillators for public use at all of its facilities in [local] County. The defibrillator is a lifesaving device for individuals suffering from cardiac arrest or other medical emergencies.

In 2003, [Company Name] Board of Directors approved the purchase of terrorism insurance to protect the utility's \$360 million infrastructure from a potential attack.

Participant #2

- Develop a written Vulnerability Assessment Plan.
- Develop a written Emergency Response Plan.
- Meet periodically with staff with the objective of identifying potential areas susceptible to impact. We then attempt to eliminate or minimize the exposed area. If that is impractical, then we develop a plan of action to address restoration in the event impact occurs.
- Meet periodically with a statewide association of other electric utilities to do the same. We also discuss mutual aid (assisting other utilities that experience impacts).
- Review crisis events experienced by other utilities to learn what works and what does not. This also helps you consider all the possible events that occur.
- Meet periodically with local government emergency response team to discuss emergency response issues.
- Maintain an emergency preparedness manual with emergency contact numbers and procedures. The numbers are of other utilities (mutual aid), material suppliers, employee rosters, fuel and food suppliers, communication equipment (radios, cell phones suppliers), government agencies, medical treatment facilities, key customers (water treatment facilities, wastewater treatment facilities, hospitals, food suppliers, etc.), customers with special medical needs that depend upon electric service, contractors that may offer assistance, food suppliers, emergency shelters, etc.
- Prior to an anticipated storm event, meet with all employees to develop plan of action (work responsibilities, when to report, where to report, when to safe up facilities, etc). We make post-storm work assignments (material procurement, damage assessment, telephone switchboard, meal preparation, etc.) We make sure all critical facilities have auxiliary power and all response vehicles and fuel are topped off. We contact all numbers on the contacts list to ensure the numbers are accurate and the contacts are aware of our status. We secure buildings and facilities (board them up). We notify the public of our status and preparations and request that they prepare for the storm. We advertise the telephone number for our emergency response attendant. We ensure our emergency supply cabinets are fully stocked. We ensure all radios are accounted for, have adequate spare batteries, and are fully charged.

Participant #3

In 2001, [Company Name] went through a reorganization and moved to a process-based structure. Therefore, during the recent hurricane events, many departments had to coordinate to ensure all goals and objectives were met in restoring power as quickly as possible.

We conducted two meetings daily, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, until the outage figures dropped to a reasonable number (below 40,000). At that point, we went to one meeting per day, and these meetings were conducted via conference calls over the weekend.

These involved the CEO, the Electric, Water and Sewer Operations Department, Internal and External Communications, Public Outreach, Facilities Maintenance, Client Relationships, Security, Finance, Risk Management, Safety, Engineering, Technology Services, and Governmental Relations. All vice presidents on the executive management team were at the meetings, along with many of the field operations supervisors to ensure direct information flow from the field.

Since a major disruption of electric service can jeopardize public safety and public health (affecting police, fire and hospital operations), restoring power to those operations takes precedence in a major outage. With [Company Name], another priority is either restoring power via electric wire or generators to ensure sewer pumping stations can continue to pump to avoid SSOs, Sanitary Sewer Overflows.

For many years, and with a new emphasis after the September 11th attacks, [Company Name] developed a substantial Emergency Plan Book that sets forth all operating procedures to be implemented should a disaster, natural or otherwise, occur in the service area.

APPENDIX G
PHASE 1.2 QUESTION AND RESPONSES

Phase 1.2

How has your input been incorporated into your organization's current crisis management protocols? Who else's input, internal or external, was taken into account?

Participant #2

We are a very small organization - 1 superintendent, 3 linemen, 2 apprentices, plus me.

We all discuss emergency preparation formally in meetings called for the purpose or informally everyday.

Our more experienced workers have greater insights, but everyone is free to make suggestions.

I am primarily responsible for ensuring that we are adequately prepared. It is my job to make sure we think about it, learn as much as we can from other organizations, and meet to discuss our response.

We work with other agencies in our community - local police, fire rescue, and emergency management. We also attempt to educate our public. Any input received from those organizations is incorporated to the extent it makes sense for us to do so.

We rely heavily on the information we pick up from the Florida Municipal Electric Association (FMEA) and the Florida Municipal Power Agency (FMPA) regarding storm preparation and emergency response.

Participant #3

When the hurricanes began making landfall, we were handling outage information by request. We realized that, while we wanted to remain accessible to the media, this was becoming extremely difficult. Therefore, once the major impact of the storm had passed, we implemented a twice daily communication to the media and other stakeholders (the Emergency Operations Center, City Council Members, Mayor, neighboring county and city representatives, and to all internal contacts, etc.) on updated outage information and where our crews were working. We e-mailed and faxed to all the groups mentioned at 5 a.m. and at 4 p.m. daily to ensure morning and afternoon television broadcasts, drive time radio and newspapers would have access to current information

when they went on the air. This also freed up our operations staff to stay focused on the work of restoring power rather than responded to requests for information throughout the day. Also, we would communicate rumor-control information, based on questions we were receiving from the media and the public. Most of our external stakeholders were pleased with the move, especially city council members and city hall, where constituents were calling when they couldn't reach [Company Name].

One serious complaint was that customers could not get through to [Company Name] on the phone. We were receiving more phone calls in one day than we usually received in a month, so there was no way we were capable to respond to everyone. Therefore, based on input from the communications and customer outreach personnel, we set up teams of three-to-five employees to go out to the most affected areas and talk to customers one-on-one. This was a highly effective move in raising our customer satisfaction levels and the general public relations boost we received from the effort.

Participant #4

Our representative meets with the local government emergency response team to discuss issues and make plans.

APPENDIX H
PHASE 2.1 QUESTION AND RESPONSES

Phase 2.1

What characteristics of the crisis event influenced your organization's crisis response?

Participant #2

The most significant storm characteristic that impacted my area was simply the amount of damage incurred.

We watch for storms and prepare for impact pretty much the same way. We insert lessons learned as needed to our preparation.

Damage assessment and restoration of service were the big tasks we faced post-storm. There was a lot of pressure to restore power ASAP. We prioritized our major circuits and critical facilities. The effort expended by everyone within our organization to recover from the storm's impacts is most memorable.

Participant #3

Unlike other smaller storms and events, the first major hurricane (Frances) forced us to modify our normal procedures for communicating with customers and the media.

Our typical procedure is for customers to contact [Company Name] by phone in the case of an outage. With more than half of our customers out of power on Labor Day morning, our phone lines received as many calls in one day as [Company Name] typically receives in a month. Therefore, many customers could not contact us. (At this point, their calls were not necessary, since so many circuits were out and we already knew where they were). Under normal circumstances, we also ask customers to report downed power lines to use through the customer care center (our main switchboard number).

Therefore, - through the media - we communicated to customers not to contact [Company Name] with outage information. . .to instead wait for us to communicate through the media when that customer communication would be necessary. We also asked customers to contact 911 to report downed power lines. This allowed fire officials to tape off areas where lines were down to allow our linemen to work on the main circuits that would bring more customers back on line quicker.

We resumed normal customer communication procedures once the number of outages got down to a minimal amount (about 40,000 without power).

To assist in communicating with customers who could not reach us, and might not have access to a radio, we assembled three-person teams to visit the most affected areas to hang door-hangers regarding the restoration process and when crews would be in their neighborhoods.

With our two-time-per-day blast fax to the media, which we also shared with area cities/council members so they could assist in communicating up-to-date and accurate information, we also added a rumor-control narrative. Based on feedback received first-hand and through our customer care consultants, we would address rumors (rich people are getting power back on first, the utility is supplying free generators to wealthy customers, etc.) and quell some of the misinformation that would spring up in different areas of town.

In terms of the restoration process itself, our normal procedure is to work on distribution lines (lines within the neighborhoods) first, then move out toward the substations.

However, with so many people without power, that was no an effective way to go. Therefore, we worked the opposite direction -- from transmission lines to substations, substations to distributions, and into the neighborhoods last. This allowed [Company Name] to get the major circuits, thus the largest number of customers, back on quicker, then move into the smaller pockets (neighborhoods) and then handling the individual outage problems last.

While there were many minor changes we made in our operations and communications procedures, these were the major changes we administered within two days of Hurricane Frances. . .and employed throughout the subsequent strike of Hurricane Jeanne.

Participant #4

We are a small city and work closely with the county emergency management team.

APPENDIX I
PHASE 2.2 QUESTION AND RESPONSES

Phase 2.2

Were certain publics more vocal regarding their need for power restoration? Did their requests influence your organization's response?

Participant #2

The most vocal group in our community was a more affluent gated community that felt they were not receiving adequate attention. Our priorities for restoration were major feeders, critical facilities, major commercial, everyone else.

We were contacted by people for every part of the community wanting, and in some cases demanding, their power restored.

Rarely did it affect our plans for restoration - the exceptions were previously unknown critical or medical needs and quick easy fixes that would restore power to many customers.

Participant #3

While there is no precise data on this, my perception would be that parents - a few days into the outages - began to express concern over getting the schools opened as soon as possible. Pressure came from the mayor's office, vis-a-vis the city council members offices through their constituents, that [Company Name] needed to make school restoration a priority.

Obviously, reasons for this were many -- kids home from school over extended days begin to affect the ability of parents to get into their work routine (if their employers had power), costing them additional money for day care or requiring them to stay home. Also, having no power at home would just irritate an already stressful situation at home.

This pressure did influence our organization's response somewhat, but did was difficult to focus on a school's power supply when the entire circuit serving the school and the adjacent neighborhoods were out of power. We did identify that school administrators did not have a good handle on how many schools did not have power, and [Company Name] did develop a contact/location list for all schools we serve -- which we did not compile prior to the hurricanes.

Participant #4

Our electric department got the police, fire and emergency services running, then tackled the downtown business and medical clinic. Residents called in from all over town with requests for power. Three of us in city hall worked with no power and flashlights when upstairs to fill out sheets of requests for service and faxed them to the electric department (the cell phones the electric crews had were not working). Our city had electric crews from four other cities assisting us with rebuilding the lines.

Our electric crews were not influenced by who called, but rather in order of the request.

APPENDIX J
PHASE 3.1 QUESTION AND RESPONSES

Phase 3.1

How did the 2004 hurricane season influence your organization's preparation for future crises?

Participant #2

It provided us with valuable experience. There is no substitute for experiencing events.

It provided us with a compilation of information related to emergency response that we will incorporate into future emergency response manuals and minimize the amount of "reinventing" that is required.

It generated much, much discussion and dialogue related to emergency response. I / we participated in as much of this dialogue as possible to learn from the experiences of others.

Participant #3

Brian, I've touched on some of these previously, but in a nutshell, here are the major changes:

- Strengthening our electrical mutual aid agreements
- Initiating a more formal water and sewer mutual aid program
- Upgrading some of our coastal-reliability-standards equipment near the beach
- Upgrading insulators, cut-outs, arrestors, etc in areas that experienced problems
- Documenting recovery expenditures in a "FEMA-friendly" format
- Assigning office/engineering staff (to handle customer interactions and non-repair type work) to ride with repair crews
- Including door-to-door employee-customer communications with TV, radio, newspaper, internet communications plan
- As much as practicable, beginning detailed, systematic engineering assessments prior to restoration work
- Changing initial recovery response to concentrate on main lines, substations, etc
 - i.e., start with transmission and substations...then feeders...then laterals...then services
- Changing our customer information procedures
 - E.g., customer will not be asked to report outages during initial heavy recovery work

Participant #4

After dealing with three hurricanes in one season, each city department had a new understanding of what they would need to do to be prepared for the 2005 season.

APPENDIX K
PHASE 3.2 QUESTION AND RESPONSES

Phase 3.2

Considering what your organization learned from the 2004 hurricane season, do you feel prepared for the 2005 hurricane season? What concerns does your organization have?

Respondent #2

No, we do not feel fully prepared for a hurricane season. The cost involved with fully preparing to respond to hurricanes like those that hit central Florida are too great for a small utility to overcome in a single year.

We will list our needs, prioritize them, and address them when possible.

Our great concerns are with inventory of material items, communication equipment, and obtaining assistance through mutual aid.

Respondent # 3

Yes. Since all of us went through the actual event, as opposed to doing a drill or tabletop exercise, we all have first-hand experience on dealing with the major impact of hurricane winds and the aftermath. We now know what procedures need to be modified, compared to normal operating procedures that we have for dealing with typical spring/summer storms, and how all agency personnel can be used more effectively to work with customers and communicate with them and the media.

[City Served] actually did not take a direct hit, but was affected by the strong winds on the northeast side of both hurricanes. Based on what we saw last summer, there is a concern on the additional amount of damage that would be caused to [Company Name] and the city, and the time it would take to restore the area to normal, if we were ever to receive a direct hit from the eye of the storm.

Respondent # 4

Our organization learned that you may think you are prepared, but when you have three successive hurricanes wreck havoc on your community in six weeks, you can't get that prepared.

We will always have concerns when Hurricane Season approaches. We know how hard we worked to tackle whatever was thrown our way in 2004 putting our city back together.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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