CRISIS COMMUNICATION APPROACHES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: A STUDY OF SELECTED GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES IN NAIROBI - KENYA

BY

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DECLARATION

I declare that this is an original work which is a result of my own research and personal efforts. Further, it has not been submitted to any other college, institution or University other than Moi University, Kenya.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, foremost my wife Wanjiku, the children, Nyawira and Gakunga whose unwavering support and encouragement gave me the inspiration to carry on.

ABSTRACT

This study sought to identify factors that inhibit effective crisis communication in the Kenya public sector with a critical look at the role of Public Relations Officers (PROs) who are referred to as Public Communications Officers in government ministries. The study was inspired by the prevailing public perceptions of a government that has not yet managed to put its public communication systems in order especially in times of crisis. On many occasions, government ministries in Kenya have communicated different and sometimes contradictory positions on the same issue. This turns the spotlight on the PROs who are the chief government advisers on public communication. It begs the question; what role do they play in helping their organizations to communicate effectively during crisis. The main objective of the study was to examine management of crisis communication in the public sector focusing on the role of Public Relations Officers. The specific objectives were, to assess current crisis management approaches in the public sector in Kenya; to examine the effectiveness of public relations departments in crisis management and to analyse the factors that determine such approaches and effectiveness of the public communications departments in crisis management. A quantitative study was done targeting a population of 85 PROs based in the City of Nairobi which is the headquarters of all the 41 government ministries in Kenya. The study applied a cross-sectional survey design. A census was used in order to encompass every element in the population since the number involved was relatively manageable and the participants of the study were localized within Nairobi area. Primary data was collected through a self-administered structured questionnaire while secondary data was obtained from selected government policy documents. The analysis of data was done using descriptive statistics in the form of means, percentages and frequency distributions. The study revealed that policy and administrative weaknesses in public communication. In particular, majority of public relations units lack sufficient staff and budgets to carry our effective communication programs. The study established that formal crisis management structures were lacking in ministries and by extension crisis communication strategies. Out of this study, it is recommended that the government develops structures to make public relations a strategic activity in its day to day operations. Further, the government should take deliberate steps to build the capacity of the existing public relations units to enable them effectively play their professional role in the overall public communication needs of the their respective organizations.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CCP	Crisis Communication Plan
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
GoK	Government of Kenya
MEAC	Ministry of East African Community
MoIC	Ministry of Information and Communications
NCPS	National (Public Sector) Communication and Policy Strategy
PCO	Public Communications Officer
PRO	Public Relations Officer

OPERATIONAL TERMS

Audience : Recipients of media messages that are disseminated by communicators.

Code of Regulations: A set of rules that stipulates that guides the official conduct public servants conduct themselves.

Crisis: A major occurrence with potentially negative outcome affecting an organization as well as its publics, products, services or a good name.

Crisis Communication: An aspect of crisis management that handles the media and communicates to key stakeholders, thereby managing the perceptions of the situation.

Media Various channels through which messages are disseminated to their audiences. Examples of these are, but are not limited to television, radio, newspapers, the Internet.

Messages Content that is placed in the media by public relations professionals in order to elicit certain responses from the receivers of the message.

Mexican Statement: Definition of public relations that embraces the public affairs and social science aspects of an organization.

Publics People of group of people that are targeted with specific messages disseminated through the media. It can also be substituted with audience.

Schedule of Duties: An official lists the duties performed by each employee in an organization.

Scheme of Service: An official manual that provides job descriptions for various cadres of workers and defines their roles responsibilities in the organization.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Overview

This Chapter provides background information on the practice of public relations and its role in crisis communication in the public sector. It defines the crisis and its linkages with public relations. The Chapter assesses factors that impact on effective management of communication during crisis by Public Relations Officers (PROs) in the public sector in Kenya.

This study was not confined to the actual incidences of crisis occurrences in government and how communication is handled. Rather the researcher also examined situations that arise which have the potential to cause crisis and how they are handled given that not every ministry experiences crisis. In government ministries, Public Communications Officers (PCOs) perform the roles of PROs, hence in this study; both references are used to refer to the same professionals. This Chapter therefore presents information on the current status of crisis communication in the Kenya public sector and why the study is significant:

1.2 Background to the Study

Murphy's Law best defines crisis thus, *"Anything that can go wrong will go wrong"*. This expression reminds individuals and organizations to anticipate the unexpected and always have systems in place to manage crises. Public relations and crisis management go hand

in hand. According to (Fearn-Banks, 2002) it is largely the fear of negative image that causes organizations to develop public relations departments, hire public relations agencies or both. However public relations goes beyond crisis management and incorporates other disciplines aimed at creating mutual understanding between the organization and its publics.

Harrison, (2000) describes crisis as a dramatic change usually for the worse. It may be a disaster, an event which involves loss of life or extensive damage to property or it may be a situation where an organization finds itself under an unwelcome scrutiny because of its behaviour or that of its staff. This is consistent with Fearn-Banks definition of a crisis as a major occurrence with potentially negative outcome affecting the organization as well as its publics, products, services or a good name. Different characteristics distinguishes crisis from problems. Fearn-Banks states that a problem is normal in the ordinary flow of business but a crisis denotes something more serious. It interrupts the normal flow of business and therefore it cannot be a normal part of the flow. (Argenti, 2003) identifies the key distinguishing features of crises as: the element of surprise, insufficient information whereby the organization finds itself in a situation that requires all the facts right way. Other features are the quick pace of events that provide no time to organize (if at all there is no prior strategy) and intense scrutiny especially from the media.

Usually organizations facing an issue or crisis tend to behave in one or two ways according to (Black, 2009). They either take a negative approach (we have something we must minimize /ignore/cover up because it will threaten our reputation – let's say nothing) or they see the positive side (we must face up to this and be proactive as this will

help to rebuild/ enhance our reputation - lets tell the people what has happened and what we are doing about it). This is where crisis management and public relations finds convergence. Public Relations (PR) comes in to help the organization design a course of action to take by focusing on how to communicate with its stakeholders.

1.2.1   Public Relations and Crises Management

Fearn-Banks, (2002) states that since the term *Public Relations* was coined in the 20th Century the profession has been crisis driven with PR programmes being developed either to prevent a crisis or to recover from a crisis. Even though PR techniques started being applied by governments in effecting social change as early as the 19th Century, especially in Europe and America, the application of PR intensified after the Second World War (Jefkins, 1998). For example in Britain, a specialized agency by the name Central Information Office was established in 1946. Its role was to advise government about publicity and marketing campaigns, press work, publications and advertising and to supply the necessary staff (journalists, press officers, radio producers, film makers, web designers and editors) and services to implement them.

According to Ewing (cited in Harrison, 2000) the idea of issues management as discrete and vital function originated in the 1970's. This is when companies began to wake up to the idea that public policy and public opinion (in the forms of special interest groups) could have a major impact on their profitable operation.   Issues management was typically concerned with identifying and communicating about and influencing an incubating set of organizationally relevant public perceptions and attitudes (Heath & Vasquez, 2001). However, as the wave of globalization sweeps across the world,

organizations that hitherto operated as closed shops have increasingly come under public scrutiny not just in the domestic arena but also globally. This exposure has been facilitated by enhanced communication and increased democratic space.

In Kenya, majority of public relations units in government ministries were established in the past ten years. Prior to that, only a few ministries had PROs. These PROs are domiciled in the Ministry of Information and Communications (MoIC) which administers their Scheme of Service and thereby wields the power to transfer them and promote them. Thus when any other ministry requires a PRO it usually makes a written request to MoIC which upon positive consideration of the request identifies and posts a PR officer.

On the other hand, MoIC may fail or decline such requests on several grounds key among them shortage of staff. What this means is that the rest of the Ministries have little say on the number of PRO they have and even their levels of seniority as this is determined by the Ministry of information. Under the circumstances, several scenarios come into play; some Ministries end up with enough PR professional that they require, others fail to get the optimal number while others end up with those that are available. The latter could be junior PROs who normally would not qualify to head PR Units but have to do so owing to shortage of staff in that profession. As this study found out, even though all Ministries have at least one PRO, their numbers fall below the optimal level to carry out effective programmes.

The role of the PR professional in government is;

To advise on the best media practices which promote good Government

relations, preparing and organizing media/press briefs on weekly or monthly basis, identifying significant events which require packaging of Government information for broadcasting to the media and public, organizing fora where Government policies, programmes and projects can be propagated and promoted, preparing media supplements, documentaries, press releases, features, advising Ministries/Department on matters of public communications and dissemination of information, carrying out research on public opinion on specific sectoral areas in the Government and providing appropriate strategies to address the situation; and formulation of National Public Communications Policy and design of a Government communications infrastructure. (GoK, 2007).

Public relations departments in government ministries are categorized as support functions alongside others such as human resources, planning, procurement, accounts, finance, information and communications technology departments. The senior most position is that of the Minister, followed by Assistant Minister and Permanent Secretary at the executive level. At the technical level, the directors head the respective departments. The senior most PR professional outside the Ministry of Information is at the level of Deputy Director of Public Communications. Senior Assistant Director, Assistant Director, Principal Public Communications Officer and Chief Public Communications Officer follow in that order. Ideally, all Ministries should be served by a Deputy Director but there are not enough to go round, hence some end being served by PR officers' four rungs under. As indicated in Chapter Five, positioning of the PRO in the

organization hierarchy determines how much clout they wield in influencing policy and administrative decisions. Thus those heading PR units while occupying lower ranks in the organizational chart may not have an influential voice or no voice at all as afar as policy decisions are concerned.

However, even with the existence of the units, the performance of government communication during crisis does not reflect effective management. Too often, the government seems to react after a crisis has been reported mainly by the media. There is an evident lack of coordinated crisis communication plan with officials giving conflicting positions on the same issues. Yet according to Fearn-Banks (2002) effective crisis management which includes crisis communications can sometimes bring the organization a more positive reputation than before the crisis and not only to alleviate or eliminate the crisis.

1.2.2   Government Communicators

Before 2004, the government did not have any form of a centralized source of information for its diverse public and especially the media. Aware of the rising need to manage its reputation, the Government of Kenya (GoK) in 2004, made what was a deliberate effort to manage its information flow and by extension repair its hitherto poor reputation by creating the office of Public Communication Secretary or the Government Spokesman. The role of this office was "to effectively facilitate communication between the Government of Kenya, its citizens and global audiences" (http//www.communication.go.ke, 2012). Its mission was to build an efficient and proactive government communication system through research, training and information

dissemination for good governance and positive image of Kenya. This new outfit would bolster the work of public relations officers who were deployed in government ministries to manage public communications. Besides, it was expected to serve as a one stop shop for public information from the government.

The motivation for openness was driven by the need to assure the public that the new government was determined to make a break with the past which was perceived as less transparent. Before then, only the president appeared to be the official government spokesperson by default owing to his penchant for commenting on myriad issues affecting his government. Other government functionaries appeared to restrain themselves from engaging constantly in public communication perhaps for fear of contradicting the President. Not much information was forthcoming from government as public servants chose a cautious approach to public pronouncements. The decision of the new government to establish the office of government spokesman was therefore intended to enhance public communication. However, except for the Office of the President which the spokesman seemed to be well briefed about, he did not appear to have sufficient information when it came to communicating on issues involving other ministries. This, however, did not discourage various publics from constantly calling upon the spokesman to provide the government position on a variety of issues. This challenge notwithstanding should not undermine the need for coordinated approach to public communication. Argenti, (2003) insists that although organizations can employ either a decentralized or centralized system approach to corporate communications for general purposes, when it comes to crisis, the approach must be completely centralized.

The need for public communication was later bolstered by the *Constitution of Kenya, (2010)* with Section 35 (1) guaranteeing every citizen the right of access to information held by the State. This law commits the State to publish and publicize any important information affecting the nation. The Constitution thus removed the remaining veil of secrecy on much of the public information that government held. This has also created a pressing need to create effective structures to manage public communications.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Reputation of government suffers in times of crises despite the existence of in-house public relations establishments. Very often, when a crisis is simmering or a real crisis in the public sector, the public gets to learn about it mainly from the mass media. It is in such situations that organizations spring into action to try and take control of the information process (Fear-Banks, 2002). This situation is consistent with (Harrison, 2000) assertion that the first time the public organization affected knows about a crisis is when a reporter telephones or turns up on the doorstep to confirm what is happening. Such reactive nature of managing crisis communication has created public perception that the government does not have proper working structures of crisis communication. This is evident in the many incidents where contradicting positions from the same government are communicated to the public.

Whenever there are conflicts, controversies, emergencies and crisis affecting government, the rallying call from the public, the media, religious group, civil societies and others is "the government should speak in one voice". The Ministry in charge of education is a case in point. In 2011 when the matter of the missing school funds came into public

limelight, the Minister and the Permanent Secretary held separate press conferences with each giving different versions of what happened. As they tried to unwrap themselves from the scandal, they all ended up looking bad in the eyes of the public. More recently, in July 2013, the Cabinet Secretary responsible for Education issued a policy statement, that striking teachers would not be paid for the days they were on strike. The Office of the President issued another statement that the teachers would be paid. The Teachers Service Commission which is responsible for paying teachers was left in confusion on which directive to follow. This scenario points at an existing problem within government ministries when it comes to crisis communication.

Secondly, and related to the above, all government ministries have public relations departments or units. However, the apparent lack of coherence by the government officials in the public communications begs the question: What is the role of the public relations officers in government ministries?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of this study was to examine management of crisis communication in the public sector focusing on the role of Public Relations Officers.

The specific objectives were;

1. To assess current crisis management approaches in the public sector in Kenya

2. To examine the effectiveness of public relations departments in crisis

management

3. To analyse the factors that determine approaches and effectiveness of public communications departments in crisis management

1.5 Justification of the Study

Even though similar studies may have been conducted on crisis communication, such as in the Madrid and London bombings in 2004 and 2005 respectively, (Coombs & Holladay, 2012) the researcher has not come across one that addresses the role of public relations in managing crisis communication in the context of Kenya's public sector. This is especially critical in the new constitutional dispensation that provides for the right to access public information which was hitherto highly controlled. Quite often, different government ministries seem to always react whenever a crisis occurs and display a lack of coherence in their public communications. This demonstrates that there are institutional inhibitions in handling crisis communication. Yet, they all have public relations department and units, which ideally should be in the forefront in developing and implementing crisis communication strategies. Moreover, public communication is an important management tool that enables organizations to plan and to structure how to engage with its stakeholders and target audiences. Consequently any organization that wishes to succeed, places communication high on its agenda (Black, 2009).

One of the policy documents available that is specific to the role of Public Communications Officers is the Civil Service Schedule of Duties which was developed in March 2007 which is explained in details in Chapter Two. The latest and possibly most

robust attempt to address this, by the time of this study, was the *National (Public Sector) Communications Policy and Strategy (NCPS).* The *NCPS* will be the first comprehensive instrument to streamline public communication in the Kenya public service. Other available documents are the communication strategies in various GoK Ministries. However, as this study found out, crisis communication is not comprehensively addressed in most of the current strategies or is just mentioned without details on the steps involved.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is intended to help the government in redefining the role of public relations officers with an aim of reviewing their scheme of service and schedule of duties to entrench crisis communication as part of their core mandate. The study will also enable the public institutions to mainstream crisis management as part of organizational management. This would enable the institutions to depart from the current reactive to proactive crisis communication strategies and thus cultivate a more positive public image. This proactive PR programmes can be used to build relationships with certain publics to make them supportive when there is a crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2002).

1.7 Scope of the Study

The study was conducted in the City of Nairobi. Its focus was on all ministries and how they handle communication during crises. The researcher conducted a census on the target population by administering questionnaires on all the cases available for the study. (Bryman, 2001) defines census as the complete enumeration of all members of the population of the study. This differs from sampling method when a small group is

selected as representative of the whole. The aim of the census was to obtain data from each and every unit, in order to make the findings accurate and reliable which can be used as a basis for various surveys. The drawback of the census is that it is considered to be an expensive, tiresome method of data collection in cases where the population is infinite. It is also considered impossible to conduct an exhaustive and intensive study. However, in this case the researcher took up the whole population as it comprises only 41 Ministries of Government. The identified group comprised Public Relations Officers deployed from the Ministry of Information and Communication to serve in other Ministries and specialized technical departments. Questionnaires were administered to this population, details of which are covered in Chapter Three.

The study looked at the current approaches in crisis communication in government. It sought to find out what policy guidelines and crisis management structures are available and what they entail. The study sought to establish if there were written policy documents on how to handle crises and the composition of their membership. The study also looked at the effectiveness of public relations units including their administrative, professional and technological capability to handle crisis communications effectively. It sought to find out if the PROs are members of team(s); (either structured or ad hoc) responsible for handling crises and whether their input or lack of it helps in resolving a crisis or escalating it. Finally, the study analysed factors that determine current approaches to handle crisis management by PR departments and their effectiveness. The study investigated if the PROs in government ministries are involved in preventing or handling crisis and to what extent. Lastly, the study looked as the factors that determine both the approaches that government use in crisis communication as well as the effectiveness of

PR units. This is a quantitative study whereby the researcher provides a description of trends, attitudes or opinions of the entire population which are covered in detail in Chapter Three.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

Public relations go beyond managing communication during crisis. However, crisis communication is one of the core duties of public relations officers. This study takes cognizance of the fact that crisis communication in Kenya's civil service is a serious challenge that warrants closer examination. The researcher therefore confined the study to crisis communication. Further the study was not able to cover the entire public sector that constitutes the GoK such as the semi-autonomous State Corporations owing to constraints of time. This would have been the ideal thing to do in order to come with conclusive findings given that public sector institutions have their individual organizational culture that impacts on their communication behaviour. Hence the focus was on ministries as they are responsible for setting government policies which impacts on State agencies. Even though GoK operations cover all regions of the country where crisis also occurs, the study was restricted to Nairobi which is the headquarters of all ministries. This was, however, not critical because there were no public relations officers based in the regional offices at the time that the study was conducted. Hence the findings were not affected as the primary focus was on the approaches that government takes in addressing crisis communication focusing on the effectiveness of PROs who are all based at the headquarters.

1.9 Summary

In this Chapter, the researcher has looked at the background within which the research study was conducted by bringing out the situation as it existed in government crisis communication behaviour. The Chapter explored the political element in government crisis communication that explains how the public perceives the government efforts to communicate before, during and after a crisis. Political element refers to the prevailing discussions about the issue which in this case if crisis communication in the public sector. Consideration was also given to the studies that have already been done, which nevertheless have not been sufficient to close all gaps in government crisis communication. Given that the subject is broad, the limits of what can be covered in the research was delineated but it was nevertheless sufficient to bring out the problem. The Chapter justifies why the study is important especially in helping policy developers in government to come up with effective structures to manage crises through communication. The next Chapter discusses what scholars in crisis communication say in the context of crisis management.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

Jefkins, (1998) describes Public Relations as a form of communication which is essentially about creating understanding through knowledge. Thus PR happens through human interactions in their exchange of information. Tench and Yeomans (2006, p.29) concurs, with Jefkins when they describe PR managers' role as communication facilitators "who acts as a communications broker, maintaining clear channels of communication between an organization and its publics; liaising, interpreting and mediating. Thus the PRO is an agent of both parties and seeks to take care of their fears, expectations and concerns". Going by Tench and Yeomans descriptions, the PR professional is also a problem-solving process facilitator, "who helps others solve their communication problems, acts as a counsellor or adviser to planning and implementation of necessary programmes". On the other hand, communication, regardless of form or content, is about the transfer of information from one party to the other. Thus when people communicate, they engage in a relationship and this is what makes PR and communication two sides of the same coin.

This Chapter reviews the environment in which public relations are conducted in the context of crisis management prior to and during the onset of a crisis. Besides defining public relations and the misconceptions of what it is not, this literature review goes deeper into key theories that explain the nature of public communications in

organizations and the resultant outcomes. The main thrusts of the explored communication theories is how organizations can cut an edge in building and maintaining good relations with their publics to insure themselves against adversity during crisis.

2.2 Public Relations

To understand public relations, various definitions have been put forth by many scholars and institutions. Among the acclaimed definitions is the one by the (British) Institute of Public Relations (IPR). It defines public relations as "the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics" (Jefkins, 199). The underlying emphasis here is that PR is not an event that happens once and goes but a process that is continuous. It also underscores that fact that PR is not an ad hoc or spontaneous occurrence but a planned activity.

The other definition is by individual scholars such as (Wilcox, 2005) who describes public relations as the management function that identifies, establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationship between an organizational and various publics on whom its success or failure depends. The management function is also emphasized in enhancing public understanding of communication between an organization and the various publics.

The Mexican Statement provides the other definition of public relations. It states that "PR practice is the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organizations leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organization and the public interest" (Jefkins, 1998). This Statement

was coined by the World Assembly of Public Relations Associates in Mexico City in 1978. The Statement seems to emphasise the principle of public interest whereby an organization may conduct a survey or any other relevant activity before embarking on the actual implementation of PR programmes.

However, (Black, 2009) takes a radical view of public relations. She states that although PR is management function a central part of the organizations continuous communications process with all its stakeholders, it is positioned as part of the marketing support function in others and a job done by whoever has the spare capacity. Black asserts further that in organizations where the PR does not exist, the human resource department usually takes up the duties by locating the staff with the closest PR mannerisms to do the job. This explains why PR is commonly placed under marketing especially in commercial institutions in the private sector as opposed to public sector where PR stands alone.

In the opinion of (Heath & Vasquez, 2001) scholars are more interested in conflict reduction as the rationale for public relations than in the ability of PR to help organizations generate market share and income. This argument is based on the need to maintain harmonious relationship between the organization and its publics by understanding each other's interests. According to Heath and Vasquez once the interests are understood efforts can be made to blend them or at least reduce the conflict by helping the public's and the organization to be less antagonistic towards each other. The authors strongly suggest that in the context of a crisis, an organization with good public relations enjoys the presumption of innocence and can recover quickly with its reputation

intact in contrast with those that do not maintain such relationships. This

Regardless of the definitions, what is not in doubt amongst many scholars is that public relations create understanding between organization and their publics through knowledge and it is therefore a form of communication. Organizations are therefore expected to derive their PR roles from any of these definitions which are, after all, closely related. In this study, the researcher adopts the definition of Heath and Vasquez in examining how PR can be used in handling organizational crises through effective communication. This can effective apply especially in organizations that are not for profit making but for public service. The definitions by IPR, Wilcox and the Mexican Statement are the realm of the ideal but not necessarily realistic. They envisage an ideal situation with no vested interest of the parties involved in the communication process. However, Black is more realistic. She presents a scenario that obtains in many organizations in Kenya and globally, where PR is placed under marketing and this is simply to help shore up revenues. The scholars seem to prescribe a "one fits all brand of PR" in their definitions whereas it is clear that the core business of an organization deeply influences which definition of PR best applies.

2.3 Theoretical Review

In this study, three theories are used to explain the context in which Public Relations is practiced and why certain approaches succeed while others fail. The theories are: The Excellence Theory (also referred to as Public Relations Models), Agenda Setting Theory and Systems Theory. In defining a theory (Infante, Rancer & Womack, 1990) describes it as a set of inter-related propositions that suggest why events occur in the manner they do.

The use of theories is necessary because they help in explaining why things happen as well as to predict what is likely to happen under certain conditions. Further, they can also be generalized beyond a singular study thus enabling researchers to apply their knowledge even to events that they have not encountered.

2.3.1   Public Relations Models

Typical ways in which contemporary public relations are practiced are based on four models developed by (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). First they provide a way of classifying the types of public relations and secondly, the models help explain the nature of relationships that organizations have with their publics which becomes critical during times of crises. (Fearn-Banks, 2002) believes that majority of the communications theories are founded on the public relations *Excellence Theory* which is based on the four models:

a.   Press Agentry

The first model is the Press Agentry. In this model, PR practitioners are more preoccupied with disseminating messages which they believe are in the best interest of their organizations. The aspect of feedback is not taken into account as this is a one-way traffic of information from the organization to its targeted publics. (Heath & Vasquez, 2001) posited that practitioners of Press Agentry seek attention for their organizations in almost any way possible. They may even use untruthful statements or withhold facts if they consider them as not contributing to the impressions they would like to create. According to Heath and Vasquez, this model is commonly used in advertising where truthfulness may not count as much as it does in PR. This model is not ideal for PR and is not commonly used in government. It is however known that governments do withhold

truthful information ostensibly "in the interests of national security'. Example of these abound in Kenya; the reports by various Commissions of Inquiry whose content are not disclosed to the public long after the inquiry was completed. Press Agentry may not be popular in the public sector because government is a provider of public services which do not necessarily have an overwhelming urge to be advertised unlike in the case of selling goods.

b. Public Information Model

Public Information Model is characterized by the desire to report information journalistically. According to (Fearn-Banks, 2002), this model is more popular amongst PR practitioners in government. The PR officers are journalists-in-residence who disseminate accurate but usually only favourable information about their organizations (Heath & Vasquez, 2001). Usually they distribute press releases and statements of what they believe their audiences need to know but this is not based on any prior research. This perception is based on the fact that truth is essential unlike the Press Agentry Model and that there is some form of monitoring done through counting press clips.   This model perfectly describes the PR practice in the Kenya government whereby the common perception is that they are merely press liaison officers. In a number of cases they are usually called upon when the Press are required. The Scheme of Service for government communication entrenches this position with its heavy bias on media relations duties for government PROs in comparison to other public relations duties.

c. Two-Way Asymmetric Model

The third one is the Two-Way Asymmetric Model which is also referred to as the Scientific Persuasion Model. This model is used by PR practitioners to persuade publics to accept the organizations points of view based on prior research. Although, there is feedback obtained, the organization does not change its communication plans or messages as it holds the view that it knows best. With the Two-Way Asymmetric Model, practitioners conduct scientific research to determine how to persuade public to behave the way their client organization wants (Heath & Vasquez, 2001). Examples of activities carried out in line with this model are the Customer Satisfaction Surveys that are conducted in Kenya public sector to gauge public opinion on government services. The common characteristic of models 1, 2 and 3 is that they do not consider the communication needs of their publics but only those of the organization. Thus, the organization practising those models may have weak relationships with their publics before the onset of a crisis. The models do not promote an open and honest policy with stakeholders and in particular the media.

This model underscores prior research to inform the content of the message that needs to be communicated to the public but this is not quite evident in the public sector. With reference to the existing PRO Scheme of Service, the aspect of research does not come out robustly. Where research is mentioned, it is in one line on public opinion focusing "on specific sectoral areas in the Kenya government and providing appropriate strategies to address the situation".

d. Two-Way Symmetric Model

The Two-Way Symmetric Model is one which scholars contends meets the threshold of

the most desirable and hence the excellent model. This model strives to create mutual understanding between the organization and its publics which is what contemporary Public Relations is founded upon. It underscores strong relationships between an organization and its publics. Under this model, the organization knows what the public wants and need and the public in turn understands the organizations needs and desires.it follows therefore that most PR professionals would prefer to practice The Two-Way Symmetric Model but lack the expertise to do so. Moreover, their organizations' non-receptivity to that practice leaves them with the options in Model 1 and 2. However, even with the stated preference for the Two-Way Symmetric Model, the choice of the model to apply can be driven by the nature of the situation (such as a crisis), the type of the messages and the targeted publics. What it means is that in some specific situations, the Press Agentry may even work better.

One of the main characteristic of public communication especially in government is that it is aimed at a mass audience without regard to their diversity. Yet the audiences are highly diverse hence their responses to media messages are varied reflecting their differences in regard to their personality, interest and knowledge. PR scholars are in agreement that organizations can practice each of the four models and become successful. This is because each of the models could be effective depending on the structure of the organization and the nature of the environment in which it operates.

2.3.2 Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda setting theory was coined by McCoombs and Shaw in 1972 (McQuail, 2010) describe a phenomenon studied in the context of election campaigns. This theory is based

on Bernard Cohen's statement in 1963 that "the media may not be able to tell audiences 'what to think,' but they could tell them 'what to think about" (Heath & Vasquez, 2001). (Infante, Rancer & Womack, 1990) describes Agenda Setting as a very powerful influence of the media owing to its ability to tell us which issues are important. Further, topics, issues, and individuals become important because of the attention the media gives them. The authors admit that though powerful, the media does not influence the people by introducing new issues and giving them prominence. Rather, it picks on those that exist sometimes at the individual levels and presents them as problems for the society. McQuail elaborates that the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues. Accordingly, it is not the absolute significance of an issue that counts but the relative strength of forces and people trying to define and promote the issue.

However, such influence is not absolute. Citing Davis and Robinson, McQuail observes that the media vary in their credibility. Personal experience and the media picture may diverge and the public may not share the same values about news events as the media. Take the government owned Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) news services for example; there is sufficient basis to claim that it commands more public credibility than Radio Africa News Services (Kiss FM, Classic, The Star Newspaper) if the number of defamation cases lined up against the latter is anything to go by. This claim is based on the view that KBC as a national broadcaster is careful with facts unlike the private owned Radio Africa which is susceptible to commercial interest. Credibility or no credibility may not necessarily deter the public from discussing the issues set by the media given that even the alternative media still have audience in whom it set its agenda as well.

In Agenda Setting, PR practitioners can influence what the media sets as the agenda to create public awareness and concern on the activities of their organizations. This is because the PR professionals know that the media concentrates on a few issues which it highlights thus leading the public to perceive those issues as more important than others. As we noted in the preceding section on media as a channel of crisis communication, a good press release supplied by PR professional to the news media gets published. As McQuail notes, when information is supplied to the news media by sources, it arrives with a built-in frame that suits the purpose of the source. Since the media does not exist to do public relations job, it behoves the PR practitioner to be alert and ride on the issues of interest to the media and make publicity capital out of it

This theory could be quite helpful to keen PR practitioners. They scan the environment and pick out issues that their organization can ride on to get some publicity. For example, the PRO in the Ministry of Public Health can take advantage of a cold weather spell to bring out the fact that the Ministry has been providing public hospitals with sufficient drugs. The media is likely to get interested in the information because it is topical and keep the stories running and thus focus public attention on the subject to the advantage of the ministry. The assumption here is that government PROs are well trained and aware about how this theory can help them leverage on the media to convey their messages.

2.3.3 Systems Theory

Systems theory was developed in the 19th century to explain historical developments as a dynamic process and was used by Marx and Darwin in their work. It provides a set of concepts to help in understanding communication as a set of interdependent units that

work together to adapt to a changing environment (Infante, Rancer& Womack, 1990). Under their description, an organization is defined as an open and integrated system held together by laws and regulations. "Being an open system means that an organization is in constant contact with its environment that includes customers, suppliers, government and other groups of individuals or institutions", (p.90). They further explain that organizations operating in open systems are able to keep recreating themselves and adapting to the environment in which they operates thus ensuring their survival. In a closed system where an organization does not communicate with its publics, it tends towards entropy, that is a situation characterized by chaos and disorder which is a recipe for collapse. This means that interaction and adaptation with the environment increases the organizations chances of survival.

The authors cite several studies employing the systems approach in communication. Their focus is on the exchange of information and the development and maintenance of relationships among the members of a system. In other words, an organization must communicate with both its internal and external publics not only in sending messages but also by receiving feedback. This enables it to evaluate public perception and determine what action needs to be taken to change where necessary. This theory is critical at the current state of constitutional order in Kenya where the right to public information has become law. Previously communication in government was tightly controlled through statues such as Code of Regulations and classification of documents. One may rightly argue that the government of the old constitutional order tended towards entropy. Still the idea of the Kenya government being one family as envisioned by the Systems Theory seems not to be attained as yet. What emerges is that the PROs operate in silos without a

harmonized policy to guide corporate communications. Knowledge and application of this theory can help government be in sync with its publics.

Infante, Rancer and Womack further states that the systems perspective "requires you focus attention on the whole family and that you see each individual, member in the context of the whole family" (p.90). As a corporate (family) member of the community in which it operates, the organization must nurture an interactive relationship with other members. This is because the concept of family is based on the communication and interaction of its members to create mutual understanding.

2.4 Crisis Management

The definition of crisis management underlines the aspect of planning and doing what an organization must do either to prevent a crisis or to resolve it with minimum or no damage to the organization. Crises management refers to the ability to cope with any emergency situation that may arise in such a way that the minimum amount of "damage" is caused to the organization in whatever context. It does not only entail being able to cope but being seen as able to do so, otherwise the organization will suffer damage in terms of image and credibility, not only with the workforce but also with the general public. It also underscores the fact that managing a crisis is a continuous process that exists even when there is no crisis but in anticipation of one. In defining crisis management, (Fearn-Banks, 2002) describes it as a process of strategic planning for a crisis or a negative turning point, a process that removes some of the risk and uncertainly from the negative occurrence and thereby allows the organization to be in greater control of its own destiny.

Another definition by (Nweke, 2001) says that crisis management is the advice given on the need to plan and possibly do everything within your reach to ensure and prevent an uncanny event not to occur. It involves the application of appropriate steps to either prevent a crisis or to promptly control it once it occurs. Nweke describes crisis management as proactive, preventive and pre-planned in nature. There are three basic elements that come in defining a crisis: the element of threat to the organization and sometimes its publics; the element of surprise as well as the short time needed for action and decision. People seem to get reassurance concerning their physical well-being and safety largely from believable information that pierces through the uncertainty, rumours and gossip. As argued by (Center & Jackson, 2002), crises will vary from acts of God, to mechanical problems to human error and to even management decisions and actions. Some of the crises will have taken long to 'hatch' but that does not mean that management of the same is easier.

2.4.1 Proactive Crisis Management

Advance planning for any crisis involves conducting an assessment of the organization in an objective manner and imagining situations that could arise. The next step would involve coming up with contingency plans to take care of the different imagined scenarios. The contingency plan may be specific to a certain type of crisis or one that is suited to all kinds of crises. (Center & Jackson, 2002) posit that because reputations are formed and re-formed in peoples' minds continuously, and because public issue debates are constantly taking shape, a more strategic approach is to be proactive. The two compares this approach to fire prevention meaning that PROs should be constantly on the lookout for opportunities and problems. This is however based on the presumption that

PR professionals are well placed in the hierarchical order with sufficient clout to marshal the required support. But as we learn from public sector institutions particularly in Kenya, such clout may not be there given that organizational cultures tend to favour the traditional professions with resources and status as opposed to more contemporary disciplines like public relations.

On the other hand, managing crisis that has already occurred is complex though inevitable as it involves reactive approaches with sporadic and largely uncoordinated actions to stop the crisis. It makes sense to argue that managing a crisis is more wasteful than preventing it. The teams involved in prevention operate at their pace and within available resources. This however does not mean that crisis can be completely prevented regardless of the resources available and even with the best of communication structures in place. This is particularly true in crises that can be caused by natural phenomena.

In the public sector, the ministries are responsible for informing the public about their policies and programmes. In numerous situations, such policies and programs often face public resistance even when they are well intended such as the proposed abolition of schools holiday tuition in Kenya in 2012. According to (Jefkins, 1998) such reactions are plain evidence of a negative PR situation either as a result of apathy, prejudice, hostility or sheer ignorance. It is therefore not advisable for government to rely on short term awareness campaign but on a well-planned long-term PR programme to establish a situation in which it is possible for the public announcement to be accepted and acted upon sympathetically. For this to happen, the PR require to be mainstreamed in policy decision and programmes so that it can help in educating the public before-hand and

thereby prepare the ground for successful public policy pronouncement and implementation.

Fearn- Banks, (2002) observes that many organizations (and individuals) go through life saying that they think positively, that somehow if they never have a negative thought, nothing negative will happen. By thinking negatively means an organization should anticipate a crisis and put in place proactive crisis management mechanisms to pre-empt it or be adequately prepared once it comes. For example, some organizations call in the communications team when the issue is about to break or when the crisis has taken place which according to (Black, 2009) is just too late. Crisis is not always negative and can actually be unifying factor. In particular, a crisis can bring to the surface a problem that has been smouldering below the surface and thereby present an opportunity to sort it out once and for all. What makes the difference is the level of preparedness prior to the onset of a crisis or an emergency. (Argenti, 2003) proffers the key steps that organizations can effectively prevent and manage crises.

The first step is to understand that no organization is immune to crises. In the public sector, the most likely types of crises are caused by human error and management decision that leads to either action or inaction. The second step is to assess the probable risks that the organization is more prone to and then examine the best strategies to address it. Thirdly and quite importantly for PR professionals is to set communication objectives for the potential crises. This according to Argenti includes identifying the most effective of communication media depending on the nature of a crisis and the stakeholders it is likely to affect most. According to (Ruff & Aziz, 2003) each stakeholder

has a different level of involvement and how you address their concerns during a crisis is an important part of the planning process. For example, Ruff and Aziz offers that it is often a good idea to have draft documents for external audiences prepared in advance so that they only need refining to reflect what has happened.

In planning for crisis Argenti argues that the person in charge of corporate communication is the one who should call for a brainstorming session that brings together the most senior managers from areas that are most likely to be affected. The aim is to do an inventory of potential crises and prepare a prevention plan of action. Time and money, he says should be spent in the areas where the crisis is likely to have the greatest negative impact. In this argument, Argenti appears to have in mind an ideal situation where the head of PR wields sufficient clout to marshal senior managers for brainstorming. However, the reality in many public institutions is that the head of PR is not likely to be the convenor of such as brain storming session for senior managers going by their positions in the pecking order. The problem could even be in the corporate culture that may not consider spending time and resources imagining a crisis that may not come anyway. As Fearn Banks argues, problems such as the CEO not speaking to the head of public relations and ignoring complaints from consumers are signals of an impending crisis that can be devastating. It should be noted that action or inaction by people who should make decisions results in different crisis outcomes (Heath & Vasquez, 2001).

An interesting element of organizations perspectives in crisis management as suggested by Ruff and Aziz is their general assumptions that a crisis will be sudden and unexpected

whereas in reality, it is much more likely to be predictable and expected. As part of proactive crises management prior training of teams as well as staff on what to do in case of a crisis occurrence is of utmost importance. Given that no organization is immune from crises, every effort should be made to ensure there is a crisis management plan that is manageable and easy to implement.

2.5 Crisis Communication

Fearn-Banks, (2002) describes crisis communication as an aspect of crisis management that handles the media and communicates to key stakeholders, thereby managing the perceptions of the situation. Quite often, the term "crisis communication" and "crisis management" are used interchangeably. The aim of crisis communication is to prevent or lessen the negative outcomes of a crisis and thereby protect the organization, stakeholders and the industry from harm (Coombs, 2007). Hence separating crisis communication from crisis management is not logical. Ideally, crisis management plans should incorporate all corporate messages so that when a crisis occurs, it presents an opportunity to articulate integrated corporate communication and not just messages to diffuse the problem at hand.

Lack of effective communication is one of the most critical voids that require to be filled at the initial steps to handle a crisis. According to Coombs, crisis communication should concentrate on being the first to communicate given that a crisis creates an information void that must be filled. He argues that if an organization is not ready to respond when the media comes calling, the story will nevertheless run without the organizations response. Typically, when organizations do not have structured systems of managing

crisis, they tend to focus more on what to do during a crisis rather than what to say. But as (Argenti, 2003) observes, communication takes on more importance than action when the crisis involves more intangible things such as the loss of reputation. Even more critical is the choice of the communication channels that the organization selects to convey the messages to specific stakeholders. In crisis situations, argues Argenti, stakeholders crave information and are often more sensitive than usual to how information is conveyed to them. The responsibility for truth is left to the source more often than not since news media are less able to verify content themselves.

In as much as the journalists do not undertake public for organizations, there is evidence abound that little of news we receive is the outcome of enterprise and investigations on the part of journalists. A lot of it comes from hand outs provided by PR practitioners. This provides a window for PR practitioners to step in with press releases and other news materials to fill the gap. However, as (McQuail, 2010) observes, news sources are likely to vary according to the trust and credibility they have established among their audience. This means a PRO who has built a reputation with the media, for example, as a good writer will have an edge when it comes to the use of his or her communication as news.

Even as communication is crucial during a crisis, control over information is more critical, but this must be balanced with the need for key constituents of an organization to receive the necessary information at the earliest possible. In this respect, one of the key audiences that communication from an organization should be concerned about is the internal audience. This would avoid a situation whereby employees learn about their organization from an article in the press which they should have been told in advance.

The most likely person employees are likely to turn to for information is the PR officer. After all, both internal and external communications are ideally supposed to be situated in the PR department.

However, as found out in this study, there are instances when the PROs are not privy to the occurrences in their organizations that generate public information. Nothing is as distressing for an in-house PR officer than to stumble on news about his organization in the Press without his prior knowledge. When that happens during a crisis, it is an indication that the organization has lost the opportunity of being the source information, has lost control of communicating the crisis and left the fire to burn at is pace with devastating effects. However information control should be applied in a way that does not exclude critical persons such as PR practitioners since they may be called upon by journalists to clarify what they did not know in the first place if they were not involved. (Argenti, 2003) argues that many a routine incident or event has been turned into a crisis because too many people were told too much and the situation became exaggerated and out of control. The objective of crisis communication is achieved through the effectiveness of the channel selected to convey the message as exemplified by. McLuhan's Media Determinism Theory. The theory argues that the media is the message, that the meaning we derive from a communication event has a lot to do with the medium through which that message is conveyed.

2.5.1 Channels of Crisis Communication

Various communications can be employed to convey crisis communication but three of them stand out owing to their high impact if used effectively. These are the mass media, both print and electronic, spokespersons and the internet.

a) The Mass Media

The mass media are now regarded as essential to successful crisis communication since they are the only channels guaranteed to reach the whole public and have the advantage of being regarded as trustworthy (McQuail, 2010). To most organizations, the traditional media channels such as radio, television and newspapers are used to convey information through press releases. These channels can also be used to continuously disseminate any other information as the crisis unfolds. Crisis communication requires constant media monitoring in order to detect any erroneous information and correct it on time. This is because the media serves as the main source of information to the public and thus any misleading information can lead to the escalation of the crisis. What is therefore required is a partnership between the media and the organization which allows both parties to have rapport and trust in each other.

Argenti, (2003) states that generally, the person who has the best relationships with individual reporters is probably the right person to get involved with them during a crisis and even before crises. He observes that if the organization has built cordial relations with the media when the times are good, reporters will be more understanding when the crisis occurs. Owing to the highly competitive nature of media work, reporters are used to crisis environment and all they want is to get a story fast. According to Argenti, what they are looking for is "a good story with victims, villains and visuals." This means that if

reporters come calling, one should not treat them as partners or allies in maintaining or restoring the good image of the organization. Instead, one should be accessible and pleasant and understand the reporters' job. This is where prior training in not only public relations skills but on how media operates is crucial. The communication behaviour by top government of Kenya official seems to suggest that media relations' training is not provided.

One of the things that PR practitioners learn is that the first responsibility that a journalist has is to the employer and secondly to the audience. (Jefkins, 1998) posits that it is quite likely that what the readers want to read and equally, what listeners want to hear and viewers want to watch is not what the PR practitioner wants to publish or broadcast, hence the perception that the media prefer the bad news. (Howard & Mathews, 2006) advised organizations to understand the feeding needs of the media.

It is also true that PR practitioners can influence to a certain extent the news content through well-crafted press releases, press statements, press conferences and others. McQuail contends that there is considerable evidence to suggest that well-organized suppliers of information can be effective and that a good deal of what is supplied by public relations agencies to the news media actually get used. There is however notable over-reliance on press conferences to conduct crisis communication sometimes escalating the conflict. An example is the case of the missing school funds referred in Chapter One in the Ministry of Education in early 2011. The Minister and the Permanent Secretary held separate press conferences with each giving a different version of what happened in an attempt to unwrap himself from the scandal.

b) Spokespersons

Spokespersons play a starring role in any crisis situations. Often this role is played by the Chief Executive Officer who is usually the public face of the organization. His face is most common on the television screens; his voice is most likely to be on radio and his name in the newspapers pages. This happens in the ordinary day to day activities of the organization as it interacts with the public through various media channels. Indeed most public relations professionals also consider the CEO to be the spokesperson of choice during crisis, especially when the magnitude of the crisis on the organization is massive. (Fearn-Banks, 2002) contends that the CEO usually has the most credibility with the public and the media as the person who has sufficient clout to make weighty decisions on behalf of the company. This position differs with that of Argenti (2003) referred in the preceding section who points at the PRO as the most preferable spokesperson owing to his/her knowledge of how media operates. The question that arises is what happens if the CEO is responsible for the crisis in the first place? There are schools of thought that contend that CEOs have no credibility to speak because they have too much to lose by virtue of their positions. However, (Howard & Mathews, 2006), suggests that the spokesperson does not necessarily have to be the CEO. "The person in charge may also be the spokesperson, but the spokesperson doesn't always have to be the person in charge".

Two cases illustrate this point in the Kenyan context. During the Kenya military invasion of Somalia to drive out the Al-Shabab terror organization in 2011/2012, the spokesperson was a Colonel in the army. Colonel Cyrus Oguna was the focal point for all communication coming from the war field and not the head of the Kenya Defence Forces

or the Minister in charge of defence. Amidst the propaganda that comes in times of war, Col. Oguna constant press briefings and postings on social media was the point of reference including the media. Information from other sources could only be confirmed or disconfirmed with the KDF spokesperson. This helped rally public support to the KDF incursion and popularized the Kenya military more than ever before. This contrasts with the terrorist attack on Westgate Mall in Nairobi in September 2013 where the Cabinet Secretary (equivalent of Minister) in charge of security served as the spokesperson. The Cabinet Secretary would give an official update through the media at an average of two times in 24 hours for the four days the Mall was under siege. At this time, the global audience was craving for information given that there were people of different nationalities in the Mall that had been killed, injured and others unaccounted for.

While concurring with (Howard & Mathews, Anthonissen, 2008) cautions that if the CEO is not normally the spokesperson outside a crisis, then he or she is probably not the right person in a crisis. The reason being that the public – and in particular, the media - is likely to have an existing relationship with the person who usually serves as the spokesperson of the organization. Such relationship is very critical during a crisis since the initial contact happens between people who relate with one another. In majority of cases, the persons who relate closely with the media are the PR practitioners by virtue of their official duties as media liaison officers. It makes sense therefore to argue that there is a certain basis for considering PR manager as spokespersons of the organization especially through the media. But this presents a conflict on whom between the head of PR and the CEO should ideally serve as the spokesperson during crisis given that both have a clear role to play. A distinction is also required to distinguish between a crisis

communication spokesperson and an organization's spokesperson or whether it should be same person. As demonstrated in the findings of this study in Chapter Four, Government ministries in Kenya seem not to have a clear identity of who their spokespersons are. Moreover, whereas some documents point at the Minister, others suggest it is the Permanent Secretary.

The *Civil Service Code of Regulations (Revised 2006)* states that only Ministers are authorized to make statements to the media on government policies while the Permanent Secretaries or any other authorized officials may make statements to the media on matters of fact. However, the code of regulation does not mention anything to do with communication during crises which means the same approach would apply. What may not be clear are the delineation lines between matters of policy and matters of fact. The proposed *Public Sector Communications Policy and Strategy (2012, p. 43)* is clear on the identity of the spokesperson of the Ministry. It states that "each Cabinet Minister is the spokesperson of his/her respective ministry. The Cabinet Minister should be held accountable for presenting and explaining government policies and practices related to the operations of their respective ministries." The Ministry of East Africa Cooperation *Communications Policy and Strategy Handbook* (2010, p.43) identifies its overall spokesman as the Minister who "will whenever necessary, be supported in this role by the Permanent Secretary". The PS may in turn designate other heads of department. This chain seems to point at some degree of uncertainty by cascading responsibility of spokesperson down the ladder. According to PR scholars, the identity of this person should be unequivocal.

Some of the mistakes that organizations usually make when faced with a crisis is to allow multiple spokespersons to talk and end up giving statements that are conflicting and inconsistent. This ends up compounding the organizations problems. Ideally only one version of the events should come from the organizations to the various media. If different versions are communicated, the public will be confused and most certainly consider them as untrue. The organization reputation will be torn to shreds. It is essential to have a single nominated spokesperson who is thoroughly briefed on the crisis and familiar with the crisis management plan (Heath & Vasquez, 2001). This gives the media a point of contact and ensures that the organization speaks with a consistent voice. Fearn-Banks, (2002) argues that speaking with one voice is more crucial in a crisis than during normal operations. She asserts that one primary spokesperson reduces the possibility of conflicting statements, organizational values or explanations being released to the media.

a. The internet

The internet is undoubtedly the key medium of mass communication that combines interactivity, unlimited range of content and scope of audience reach and the global nature of communication (McQuail, 2010). "It overcomes barriers of space and time with no restriction on the amount of information that can be sent or when we can receive what we want to receive". The key advantage of the internet in crisis communication is the availability of a mass communication platform for an organization to tell its story in detail. Such details are unlikely to find enough space and airtime in the traditional media. Whereas an organization should ideally have a website for continuous communication with its publics, a separate website can be created purposively during a crisis. (Howard &

Mathews, 2006) suggests that the organizational website can be loaded with content that would be of importance to the public and the media and can be made more active when the crisis hits.

Additionally, an organization can designate a section of its existing website to communicate during a crisis. For such website to be useful, it requires the crisis team to have an inventory of the potential types of crises an organization is likely to face in order to come with relevant information needed by the constituents of the organization. When a crisis occurs, stakeholders, including the news media, will normally turn to the internet to look for news about it. A proactive PR professional should therefore ensure that there is useful information which the news media and the public can use which may end up influencing the public perceptions in favour of the organization. An examination of government ministries websites in Kenya do not show any information pertaining to crisis communication. Yet some ministries have been experiencing crisis that have been widely covered in the media. As McQuail points out, the use of internet for news is fairly limited even in circumstances where it might seem to have advantage. It suffers from uncertainty concerning reliability and lack of trust according to Schweiger et al (as cited in (McQuail, 2010). For example, a survey of media use done one month after the 9/11 attack in New York showed that only 22% made use of the internet as a source.

This notwithstanding, the advantages of internet as a crisis communication medium is great especially its consistency in the speed of transmission and timeliness of messages (Heath & Vasquez, 2001). Besides it is available 24 hours and journalists can pick information from the web and use it as news in the traditional media thus reaching even

the audience who may not necessarily be internet users. The websites provide a platform upon which a PRO can still communicate to the public and promote the agenda of the organization.

2.6 Crisis Communication Approaches

This section explores the approaches that obtain in crisis communication in Kenyan in contrast to what scholars agree is the ideal environment crisis management. Of special interest is the place of PROs in in crisis communication and challenges that determine their effectiveness.

2.6.1 Crisis Management Approaches in the Kenya Public Sector

Experience has also shown that crisis management cannot be effectively handled in an ad hoc manner. An organization needs to have an established unit or team set up for this purpose (Harrison, 2000). However, too often organizations do not consider utilizing public relations until it is in a crisis. A number of scholars are in agreement that crisis management cannot be done in an ad hoc manner but should exist as a strategic policy decision. Organizations should therefore put in place policies, strategies and appropriate capacity to manage crisis communication. Two policy documents (one in operation and the other under development) sheds light on the current state Kenya government approaches to crisis management and the desired status:

   i.   **The Scheme of Service for Public Communication Officers:**

The *Scheme of Service for Information and Public Communication Officers, (March 2007)* is the key policy document that outlines the official duties of PR practitioners in

the public sector. This the document upon which the PROs are expected to derive their schedule of duties regardless of the Ministries they are deployed. The scheme, however, makes no reference to crisis communication and mainly dwells on activities that are administrative in nature. It seems the drafters did not consider crisis management as a core function of PR professionals in managing the reputation of their organization.

The Scheme seems to borrow from the Public Information Model and the Two-Way Asymmetric Models mainly focusing on disseminating information which is favourable to the organization. It talks of packaging information about government events and distributing it through the media in the forms of press supplements, press releases and features. By failing to mainstream crisis management in this operational manual, the stage was set for bungling when a crisis occurred.

ii.   **National (Public Sector) Communication, Policy and Strategy Manual**

In the Kenyan public sector, the state of unpreparedness to communicate during crisis is stated clearly in the (yet to be published) *National (Public Sector) Communication, Policy and Strategy Manual, (*NCPS, 2012*)*. It states;

> Currently, no ministry appears to have crisis management teams even when one has occurred, leading to the making of whimsical decisions which are at times criticized by the very persons who ought to defend them. This does not imply that they are not aware of the critical need to have such systems given that they are always encountering crisis which they handle in a reactive manner (NCPS, 2012).

The manual, which provides guidelines for national/public sector communication, further contends that "there are no clear guidelines on the Business Process Model relating to nationally significant matters such as a national crisis. Media engagement in itself is often not preceded by careful, factual research because (Public Communications) departments do not always have the capacity and time for it" The NCPS acknowledges the existing challenge with regard to "getting government officials to read from the same script and to speak with one voice on major national issues while also adhering to basic common professional standards that would enhance the image and standing of the Government."

In one Ministry's communication strategy, the need for crisis communication plan is well acknowledged. However the strategy does not state the specific proactive approaches the Ministry should take if a crisis occurs. Neither does it identify the steps to take nor the person(s) to take them. It states;

> The framework for the Crisis Communication Plan is based on several elements including; whether a decision is taken to go public, identifying key messages for the public statement, deciding on the most appropriate person to speak on behalf of the Ministry, and deciding the most appropriate channels of communication to disseminate this information (NCPS, 2012).

The above is a statement of intent rather than a manual to guide the organization through a crisis. It points to a lack of clear communication strategies in government Ministries whereby crisis management and crisis communications do not appear as part of the key functions. There are however exception to this state of affairs in other Ministries.

The Ministry of East African Community (MEAC) in its *Communications Policy and Strategy Handbook (2010)* is quite clear on crisis management strategy. It lists the following emergency steps to react to crisis; set up emergency team, identify and train emergency spokespersons, prepare press room/emergency information centre and a course of action press release for the press, identify and carefully craft messages to be communicated, carefully identify stakeholders that need to be communicated to immediately, ensure that the emergency team has a consistent message and conduct emergency drills for crisis communication at least once every year. This strategy represents an individual Ministry effort in addressing crisis communication but is not replicated across government as demonstrated in the Scheme of Service.

2.6.2 The Place of PROs in Crisis Communication

The role Public relations practitioners' in crisis management is in crisis communication. In an ideal environment, PR practitioners should be more concerned with what happens in the organization prior to a crisis than in the actual management of a raging crisis. This is what (Fearn-Banks, 2002) refers to as the dialogue between the organization and its publics prior to the crisis and not only during and after the negative occurrence. According this scholar, the best strategy of handling crisis is to anticipate it and plan ahead by designing both preventive control measures. The PR practitioners should therefore be well equipped with the necessary technical skills and resources to mount effective crisis prevention plans. Fearn-Banks believes that because of crises and the forecast of crises to come public relations has become the fastest growing communications profession.

One of the main roles of the PRO in crisis management is to help in taking control of the information flowing from the organization to the public. The media is usually the chief source of crisis information and thus it is imperative that they find a quick source of information or else they will get it from elsewhere. The PR practitioner who normally handles media relations should be aware that media reporting want facts now, when you don't have them, numbers when you can't speculate and estimates of damage that aren't available. Thus according to (McQuail, 2010), "government agencies and all major institutions employs news managers and 'spin doctors' whose task is to maximize the favourable presentation of policy and action and minimize any negative aspect."

This assertion is contentions and contestable by practitioners of PR who contend that this profession does much more than sheer "spinning" of organizational tales. But it is also true that the scope of their work is sometimes limited to spin doctors owing to both policy and technical limitations. One observation derived from critically analyzing the Kenya Government Communication Officers Scheme of Service is that it dwells too much on the administrative aspects of work. This confirms the observation made by Fearn-Banks that PR offices in government are perceived as appendages of the administration. It is no wonder that in government circles, the role of public communications is often taken by others leaving the PRO with a narrow mandate. Without defined crisis management teams and crisis communication strategies, it becomes inevitable that when a crisis occurs, the general trend in government ministries is to fire-fight. This inevitably calls for examination of the actual role of government PROs in the overall public relations function and especially in crisis communication.

Regardless of scope of involvement of the PR officer in crisis management or not, what is evident is that when a crisis happens, the media will take interest. It is upon the PR practitioner to know what to do with the journalists' needs for information and deadlines. Depending on how the media is managed, it can either help in dousing the flames of the crisis or provide the fuel to escalate it. (Harrison, 2000) affirms that it is the PR officer who understands better what it is like for the journalists and who can help them do a better job. Some of the problems at crisis time identified by Harrison are that often the PRO can say nothing at all to help the journalist with the story or he or she knows nothing yet or the situation is still unclear or the lines of communications have not started to unwind. It is also possible that the PRO may be prevented from saying anything in keeping with an existing organizational culture.

2.6.3 Crisis Management Team

Effective communication management is imperative to help maintain or restore the public's confidence in the government during times of crisis. In acknowledgment to this fact, the Government PR Scheme of Service states that no government is risk free thus it is essential that each ministry should set up permanent crisis management team. This brings to focus what shape such an outfit should take.

Jefkins, (1998) offers that a typical crisis management team might comprise the chief executive, public relations manager, works manager, safety officer and human resources manager. (Black, 2009) supports this position stating that members of crisis management team should comprise the chief executive and the head of public relations. The others should be relevant members of the senior management team with particular knowledge of

and /or responsibility for each given issue. (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) refers to such inclusion as "being a member of the dominant coalition" to underscore the critical need for PR professionals to belong to the inner circle of the organization. Ideally, public relations professionals are expected to participate in crisis and issue monitoring, risk assessment and communication and crisis planning as well as in post-crisis information dissemination, management and image restoration (Heath & Vasquez, 2001).

2.7   Policy and Technical Challenges

Jefkins, (1998) states that PR is labour intensive and the size of the department may be large or small depending on the size of the organization, the organization's need for effective PR and the value placed on PR by the management. However, given the numerous duties expected of PR (as outlined in the scheme of service above) it means the PR department in Kenya government would require several professionals including a publications officer, a press officer, events manager, a photographer/cameraman and support staff. Besides, given the increasing use of websites as a medium of communication, the department would need a webmaster.

Jefkins argues that it is easy to think that an internal PR department is cheaper than a consultancy service simply by comparing with fees forgetting that the PR department also has to be equipped and serviced. Hence there is no use identifying myriad tasks that a PR department should undertake when there is no sufficient human capital or budget to implement them. The typical management attitude, according to Jefkins is that having a PR manager, he or she is expected to do anything that is asked irrespective of the

workload. This can only result in too many things being attempted at the same time and none of them being accomplished well.

Besides having a crisis management strategy in place, public relations outfits should have a Crisis Communication plan (CCP). According to (Fearn-Banks, 2002), a CCP states the purposes, policies and goals then assigns employees to various duties. It generally makes communication with the public faster and more effective and should help end the crisis more swiftly that without a plan. An important part of the process is having a crisis communication strategy in place before problems occur. Without a centralized source of information, the media and the public have to keep chasing sources sometimes in futility. This is a risky situation to the reputation of an organization because a journalist cannot go away empty handed especially in a crisis situation. A story will come from somewhere – from an unreliable 'eye witness' who heard something, from a disgruntled ex-employee with an axe to grind, from someone who wants to be famous for 15 minutes by being on television or as a last resort from the journalists own imagination (Harrison, 2000).

The terrorist attack at Westgate Mall in Kenya in September 2013 brought this reality home. During the attack, local and international journalist had pitched camp at the Mall to provide a blow by blow account including live updates on what was happening. The Cabinet Secretary who was the spokesperson was not on sight and would appear once during the day and later in the day to give updates. This was too late as other sources would have already provided the story that the entire world was craving. Without having the focal person easily accessible to give the official version of events, the news media relied on unofficial sources with the ones commonly being "highly placed security

officer" survivors and witness. No CCP was evident to provide guidelines on how to take control of communication and manage what is communicated as Kenya suffered one of the worst crises in history. This obviously led to serious credibility issue on Government which made it worse by giving inconsistent information. Two examples illustrate this point; after the government announced the end of the siege in day three, gunfire erupted the following day. The other is when the President announced the end of the siege and indicated that there were bodies of hostages underneath the rubble of a collapsed section of the Mall. A day later, the Cabinet Secretary said the death toll announced before the end of the siege remained even as tens of people were still unaccounted for.

2.8 Effective Communication During Crisis

A fundamental technique used in public relations is to identify the target audience and to tailor every message to appeal to that audience. Sometimes the interests of differing audiences and stakeholders common to a PR effort necessitate the creation of several distinct but still complementary messages (Ledingham, 2003). (Coombs, 2007) identifies three key elements of communication to manage crisis. These are; instructing information, adjusting information and reputation management. According to Coombs, instructing information is mainly concerned with what to do once a crisis happens. This mainly targets critical stakeholders such as staff on the dos and don'ts and generally to keep themselves from harm. Also included are messages to increase physical safety and detail of what happened, how it will affect stakeholders and how business will continue. In terms of communication, what is most important for stakeholders is to know who is responsible for communication and avoid a situation where unauthorized staff may be

tempted to provide information that might increase harm to the organization and harm themselves in the process.

Coombs proposes that adjusting messages should include what is being done to prevent the crisis from recurring and what stakeholders can do to move beyond the crisis. Reputation management - which is what public relations officers are concerned with - is according to Coombs mainly concerned with damage control by striving to lessen the negative outcomes of a crisis on the organization. He says this is by designing messages that aim to restore the credibility and legitimacy of the organization given that it is already at credibility disadvantage for being involved in a crisis in the first place. In the context of Kenya government, reputation management seems to the default mode and this is mainly because either there is lack of elaborate crisis communication plan or no crisis communication plans at all a situation that prevails in the public service.

The following is a checklist of effective crisis communication strategies derived from the works of (Howard & Mathews, 2006), (Argenti, 2003), (Fearn-Banks, 2002), (Harrison, 2000):

i.   Defining the problem with use of reliable information and then setting measurable communication objectives for handling it.

ii. Be the first to communicate. In a crisis, accuracy falls victim to speed every time.

iii. Set up a centralized crisis communication centre to serve as the platform for all communication during crisis.

iv. Communicate early and often in order to allay any anxieties that the organization's constituents may have. Above all avoid silence as it does not help the organization tell its story.

v. Understand the role of the media in a crisis. One of the big mistakes organizations do is not giving enough briefings to the media before, during and after a crisis.

vi. Monitor news coverage in the media so that untrue allegations or misrepresentations can be dealt with immediately.

vii. Tell the truth as it is not only ethical, but it is easier that concocting complicated lies and there is no danger of being found out if you tell the truth.

viii. Provide training for dealing with the media regarding crisis management

ix. Communicate directly with affected constituents including the internal audiences

x. Know who is in charge of what responsibility including the person to give press statements.

xi. Know who has the information needed by public and where that information is domiciled.

xii. Use the technology such as the internet to get the messages out to as many of the target audiences as possible and as quickly as possible.

The 12 steps above are the basic building blocks of a crisis communication strategy that can help organizations navigate through a crisis. Reflecting on the crisis that have faced

Kenya's public sector in recent past in particular the teachers strike in July 2013 and the terrorist attack in September 2013, none would score the 12 points. A few highlights backs this position; during the terrorist attack, government did not set up a crisis communication centre; was not the first to communicate; maintained silence on critical information such as the missing persons; did not leverage on internet and was not fast enough with the updates. Truth suffered a blow as well when the government contradicted statements it had issued earlier regarding smoke billowing from the besieged Mall. Its claim was that terrorists were burning mattresses as a camouflage to escape but the true position that emerged later was that explosives were responsible.

In the case of the month long teachers strike in July 2013, the government gave contradicting signals when on one hand the Deputy President was meeting teachers to dialogue over the strike while on the other hand the Education Secretary was giving the directive to close schools to force the teachers to call of the strike. This demonstrated the challenges that arise when there is no centralized crisis communication centre.

2.9 Related Studies

Studies have been done on how public sector organizations handle crisis communications all over the world with various outcomes. Whereas factors that precipitate crises may be common in the global public sector institutions, the strategies to handle crises vary from country to country, institution to institution. This depends on the organization and its culture. Industrial strikes are some of the key triggers for crises as they have the potential to paralyze entire nations. Others are accidents and disasters. In Kenya, strikes in the education, health and transport sectors are commonly experienced and their impacts are

deep owing to the high numbers of the service providers involved and sensitivity of the service they render.

In their study on crisis communication on the air traffic controllers' strike that took place in Spain in December 2010, (Gonzalez, Castillo, & González, 2013) explored how proactive crisis communication strategies was a game changer in crisis management. The dispute was between the government and the Air Traffics Controllers Union. They analysed social reactions to messages disseminated through the media to determine the effectiveness of the government strategy against that of the trade unions. They found five key tactics that gave Spanish government an edge in managing the crisis were. These were; leadership in the media, selection of spokespersons, selling an image of being in control, designing and disseminating of messages and controlled appearances in the media;

Out of 349 journalistic items about the strike analyzed, 90 were made by representatives of the Spanish government against 21 made by the air traffic controllers. In the selection of spokesperson, the person leading the management of the crisis among the external media to reach citizens was the Minister of Public Works, who at the time had a good reputation. In selling the image of being in control, the spokesperson's first action was to call a press conference to apologize for the happening, exonerate government from the action and state what actions were going to be taken. In controlling appearances in the media, this was done by use of press conferences, official press releases and websites that ensured government had control of content and the executive was willing to answer questions about the situation. In designing and disseminating messages, the government

ensured the messages were short and selective (not more than two ideas were transmitted per press conference), and avoided the use of strong words that could cause a conflict. According to the authors, the strategy used by the Spanish government was part of an effective comprehensive communication plan that was already prepared for this kind of crisis. From the outset, this strategy put the protagonists of the conflict in two distinct categories: the Government as the defender of the citizens and the air traffic controllers as the bad guys who used passengers as hostages.

In a related study, Maria Jose Canel and Karen Sanders (Coombs & Holladay, 2012) examined two events that mirrors the Kenya terrorist attack at the Westgate Mall. These were the Madrid train bombings on 14 March 2004 and London bombings on 5 July 2005. The study showed that framing of the events by the respective governments determined the effectiveness of crisis communication. The study found out that the Spanish media coverage of Madrid bombings did support the government framing of the events as was the case with the Air Traffic Controllers referred to earlier. The authorities in Spain handling this specific crisis were regarded as untruthful in their account of the events. In London, it was different. The study found out that there was general consensus that the government of Tony Blair had handled the crisis well including the media who echoed the government framing of the events. Canel and Sander explained why the scenarios were different:

The way public authorities and officials respond to the crisis is put to test. Following the terrorist attack, the reputation of institutions like security forces and national government will be affected. The fact that terrorist plan the attacks in part to affect public opinion and consequently impact upon the government reputation indicates the need for government

to deploy public relations techniques to manage their responses. (Coombs & Holladay, 2012)

The study concluded that "Trust, competence and consistency are the three dimensions of the space in which the government communications operates." However, while acknowledging that PR techniques need to be applied in managing crisis communication, the study does not explore what the role if any did respective government PR relations play in managing the crises.

2.9 Summary

The Chapter has discussed the various approaches to crisis communication and policy frameworks that exist in the public sector in Kenya exposing the gaps between what scholars consider as the ideal environment for PR practice and the current scenarios. The techniques for effective crisis communication, the channels of crisis communication, the role of the public relations practitioner and the challenges they face have been examined in detail. Finally related studies on similar crises in the public sector internationally are presented to contextualize the argument on crisis management and communication in Kenya. What emerges in this review is that whereas the role of public relations officers in crisis management is well acknowledged, their level of involvement crisis communication is not addressed. A lot of studies have focused on crisis management structures and less on whether the PR profession in the public sector is well mainstreamed in crisis management. Thus there is a general presumption that PR is part and parcel of crisis management yet formidable challenges in policy and technical spheres affect the scope of their involvement. Questions on who is the corporate

spokesperson between the PR manager and the chief executive during crisis still lack a straightforward answer.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This Chapter outlines the plan that was used for collecting and analysing data. It further lays down the procedures and methods used in sampling, data collection and analysis. This served to minimize the danger of collecting haphazard data and ensure that the information collected met the research objectives. In this study, the researcher examined the management of crisis communication in the public sector with focus on the role of the public relations practitioner.

3.2 Research Approach

The study applied Quantitative research. Quantitative research tests the objective theories by examining the relationship among variables (Creswell, 2009). The variables can in turn be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analysed using statistical procedures.

3.3 Research Method

This study used a survey research method that entails the collection of data on a number of units and usually at a single juncture in time (Bryman, 2001). This is with a view to coming up systematically with a body of quantifiable data in respect of a number of variables which are then examined to discern patterns of association. Scholars such as

(Babbie, 2001) advocate the use of surveys for descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory purposes especially in research studies where individuals are the units of analysis. In this study, the individual units of analysis were the PR professionals on the public sector whose responses provided the data used in establishing relationships between variables. Babbie, contends that although the survey method can be used for other units of analysis, such as groups or interactions, some individual persons must serve as respondents.

According to Babbie survey research is probably the best method available to the social researcher who is interested in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly. This is more so if the target population has characteristics that could be taken as a reflection of the entire population. In this case, individual PROs day to day activities reflect the schedule to duties of these professionals in the government ministries. Secondly, surveys are effective tools for measuring attitudes and orientations in a large population, such as when one conducting public opinion polls. Babbie maintains that surveys do not merely uncover data but rather, they interpret, synthesize and integrate data and point to implications and relationships.

In this study, a cross-sectional survey was applied to examine patterns of behaviour across government ministries in regard to crisis communication. A cross-sectional design entails the collection of data on more than one case and at a single point in time (Bryman, 2001). This provided the researcher with the opportunity to encounter variations between variables which he was interested in among different ministries. This study was *ex post facto* based on the fact that the prevailing public perception of government crisis communication management is not effective.

In quantitative research, a survey is an empirical study that uses questionnaires or interviews to discover descriptive characteristics of phenomena (Reinard, 1998). According to Reinard, a survey means the process of looking at something in its entirety by scrutinizing the complete scope of the phenomena.

3.4 Location of the study

The study was located within the City of Nairobi which is the headquarters of all government Ministries. The choice of Nairobi was based on the fact that Public Relations Officers are only based at the Ministries headquarters. There are no PROs in the field offices.

3.5 Population

The population for this study was 85 Public Communications Officers in the public sector of 41 ministries in Kenya. This number is not constant because of occasional transfers and re-deployment. In some cases, a number of PROs may be withdrawn from performing communication and public relations duties in ministries and moved to the headquarters of the department in charge of public communication to perform administrative related duties.

These professionals are posted from the Ministry of Information and Communication to the other ministries to help in designing and implementing the overall communication programs. The selection of this group was based on the fact that they are professionally responsible for communication advice and hence their perspectives provide deep insights in how well or badly their organizations handle communications. The responses from this

group offered useful manifestation of the phenomenon of interest which in this case was crisis communication. They were therefore deliberately targeted to bring out some insight about the phenomenon and not as Eisenhardt and Gaebner, (2007) would call empirical generalisation from a sample to a population.

3.6 Sampling and Study Sample

Sampling can be best explained by the following quote from Samuel Johnson cited by (Reinard, 1998, p.254). *"You don't have to eat the whole cow to know the steak is tough".* This means that you do not have to gather data on every single event in the population to draw accurate conclusions.

However, in this study, the researcher conducted a census aimed at all the Public Communication officers in the 41 ministries in Kenya. At the time of the data collection, the number was 85. As indicated in Chapter One, this number is relatively small and therefore it was possible to target all of them. Despite sending the questionnaires to all and making follow ups, it was not possible to get responses from the entire population owing to various logistical challenges as explained in Chapter Four.

Table 3.1: Sample of the study

No. of Ministries	Total Number of PROs	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
41	85	62	73%

Source: Survey data (2012)

3.7 Data and Sources of Data

The primary data for this study was obtained by use of questionnaires as shown in Table 3.1. The target population for data collection were all public relations professionals in all Ministries in Kenya. Responses were received from all the Ministries including three departments that have their own PROs. The departments were the Pensions Department (Ministry of Finance), National Cohesion (Ministry of Justice, National Cohesion and Constitutional Affairs) and the Kenya Film Censorship Board (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting). The other was the Public Service Commission which is an independent organization but is nevertheless served by Public Relations Officers.

The research collected secondary data from the communication strategies obtained from three ministries. Additional data was also obtained from the unpublished *National (Public Sector) Communication Policy and Strategy Manual, 2012* developed by the Ministry of Information and Communications. Other documents were the *Revised Scheme of Service for Public Communication Officers, 2007* which outlines roles and responsibilities of the profession. The government Code of Regulations (CoR) was also useful as guide on the "dos and 'don'ts" that govern the code of ethics of civil servants including how they communicate. The researcher also looked at Treasury Circulars that give direction to Ministries on budget and expenditure controls.

3.8 Data Generation Techniques

Data was collected using questionnaires sent through email. However, in a few cases, hard copies were delivered especially during the subsequent follow-ups. The

questionnaires were self-administered. This is whereby the respondents answered the questions by completing the questionnaire themselves. As Bryman (2001) explains, self-administered questionnaires have the advantage of convenience for respondents because they can complete a questionnaire when they want and at the speed they are comfortable with. In order to ensure a higher response rate, the questionnaire carried a brief introduction of the researcher and an explanation on the importance of the study. Further, it mentioned what the study was all about to enable the respondent to understand why he/she was identified. A polite request to the respondent to spare a short time to answer the questionnaires and a guarantee of confidentiality was given in the introduction.

The researcher could have generated qualitative data for this study through other Data Generating Techniques such as interviews and observations. However, interviews were not considered as they leave room for the interviewer's personal influence and bias since they lack standardization of data collection process (Frankfort & Nachmias, 1996). Given that the researcher conducted a census targeting the entire population, it would have been difficult and time consuming to interview or observe all the participants within the period the study was conducted because they were in separate geographical locations. Besides, well designed and standard questionnaires provide data in the same form for all the respondents and thus were sufficient to collect the information needed for this study.

3.9 Reliability

Bryman, (2001) defines reliability as the consistency of a measure of a concept. Reliability determines whether a measure such as a survey is stable over time. It means that if the same measure was applied to a selected group and then repeated after the

passage of time, the results would generally be the same and any fluctuation would be insignificant as to make any difference. To ensure the reliability of the measuring instrument in this study, closed questions were used. Such questions reduced the possibility and variability of responses as they provided answers to choose from. This enhanced the clarity of the questions asked and reduced any possible ambiguity.

Questionnaires were piloted before they were rolled out to the respondents. This was necessary in ascertaining the questionnaires competency to collect required data. Piloting helped in identifying questions that were likely to be misunderstood or confusing and hence lead to some of the respondents either misinterpreting them or skipping them altogether. It also ensured that no time was wasted distributing the first version, collecting the data, entering the results and completing the analysis only to discover the questionnaire does not measure what the researcher intended.(Davies & Mosdell, 2006).

3.10 Validity

Validity is the degree to which a measure actually measures what is claimed (Reinard, 1998). It is concerned with whether an indicator designed to gauge a concept really measures that concept (Bryman, 2001). The findings are thus considered valid as every effort was made to ensure that there were no avoidable mistakes in the way the study was designed and carried out.

In this study, the researcher used a number of questions to obtain a wide range of indicators of the concept being measured. This is because one indicator would not be sufficient to ensure validity. For example, to find out the opinion of the PROs on whether

public communication in government was effective, the study used Likert Scale to investigate a cluster of opinions on a five point scale running from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Bryman notes that although reliability and validity are analytically distinguishable, they are related. Validity presumes reliability hence if the measure is not reliable, it cannot be considered valid.

3.11 Data Analysis

Analysis of data is a process of inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modeling data with the goal of highlighting useful information suggesting conclusions, and supporting decision making (Bryman, 2001). Data analysis has multiple facets and approaches, encompassing diverse techniques under a variety of names, in different business, science, and social science domains.

In this study, the data collected was edited, coded and analysed using descriptive statistics. Deductive coding was used in classifying responses into meaningful categories an assigned them numbered values. For example in understanding the roles and responsibilities of Public Relations Officers, the researcher collapsed the activities under four broad categories; administrative duties, media relations, corporate affairs and organizational communication. In all cases the researcher ensured mutual exclusivity by having each response fall into only one category and every response fitting within a certain category under the rule of exhaustiveness. Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) describe exhaustiveness as a situation that ensures the enumeration of categories is sufficient to exhaust all the relevant categories. Thus each and every response or behaviour can be classified without a substantial number being classified as "other".

A descriptive analysis of all independent and dependent variables is provided. This is in form of means, frequency distributions and percentages. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used in analysing the data. The results were presented in the form of charts, tables and graphs. The following statistical techniques were employed to treat the data gathered in the study:

Frequency count and percentage was used to describe the profile of the respondents, the ministries that have operational crisis plan as well as membership of PROs to key decision making committees of their respective organizations. Weighted mean was employed to describe the level of effectiveness of public relations departments in the ministries as well as the level to which these units were independent. The mean was used to indicate the average number of PROs in government Ministries and those that have dedicated budgets. A number of graphs and pie charts were used to represent the crisis management approaches known to the population. This was especially in finding out how much knowledge of these approaches is present within the practitioners of public relations in the Ministries.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

This study was undertaken within ethical frameworks of social research. In particular, the research was guided by legal and moral principles of social research as outlined by (Diener & Crandal, 1978). These are; where there is lack of informed consent, whether deception is involved, whether there is harm to the participants and whether there is an invasion of privacy. The researcher sought appropriate authorization to conduct research in all the ministries in accordance with government requirements. This included a letter

from Moi University to introduce the researcher to the study case. Permit to conduct the research was obtained from the National Council of Science and Technology.

The principle of informed consent was observed with an explanation to the respondent about the purpose of the research. According to Bryman, this principle also entails the implication that even when people know they are being asked to participate in the research, they should be fully informed about the nature of the research and possible implication on them. This means they should be aware of what they are entitled to including the right to withhold certain information or to withdraw information they have provided to protect themselves from harm. Informed consent also means that the right to privacy is surrendered for that limited domain. Temptation to deception comes when the researcher want to limit participants understanding of what the research is about so that they respond more naturally to the experimental treatment.

Every effort was made to maintain confidentiality by identifying the circumstances in the study that may pose harm to the participants especially when accessing secondary sources of data such as policy documents. Even though this may entail use of pseudonyms in extreme cases to ensure individuals are not identified and exposed to harm, this was not necessary. In this study, there was no apparent risk to the participant's jobs for disclosing government information as none of the documents fell under confidential, classified or secret categorization.

3.13 Summary

The Chapter discussed the steps the study took in the research design; from identifying

the target population, data collection methods and procedures, data analysis, interpretation and reporting. The geographical location of the study and the population to be sampled was identified including the research methods and techniques used in generating data. The Chapter presented in full package the process which best presents credible findings within an ethical framework and which sufficiently represents the correct status of the phenomena under study. The next Chapter presents data collected from the study, how it was analysed and interpreted.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Overview

This Chapter shows how the data was analysed and provides the interpretation of results. It serves to provide an interconnection between the data collected and the theories that supported the study. Further it presents the analyzed results based on the objectives of the study. The findings presented were obtained from a total of 62 respondents out of 85 to whom the questionnaires were sent. This represented 73% of the target population. A total of 36 questionnaires were collected physically while the rest, 26, were returned by email. This constituted 58% and 42% respectively.

The study could not obtain 100% responses from the target population because at the time of the study, there were many transfers affecting the Public Relations Officers. Some of the transfers involved re-deployment of PROs from ministries to the Department of

Public Communication where they no longer carried duties relevant to the study. There were also new postings of officers who therefore did not have any experience in their new duty stations by the time the study was being conducted. Finally, frequent official travels by some of the officers outside their duty stations made it difficult to obtain their responses within the study period.

4.2 Respondents Gender and Age

The results of the survey established that majority of the Public Relations Officers in government Ministries were men constituting 64.5% while 35.5% were women (Figure. 4.1). This ratio is significant in the sense that it meets the constitutional requirement of gender representations of at least 1/3 of either. In terms of age, the survey found that 71% of the PROs are in the 41 to 50 age brackets while 16.1% are aged 51 to 60 years. Some 12.9% are in the ages of 31 to 40 years. This means that majority of the PR units in Ministries are manned by experienced middle-aged professionals with the youngest respondent aged 31 years.
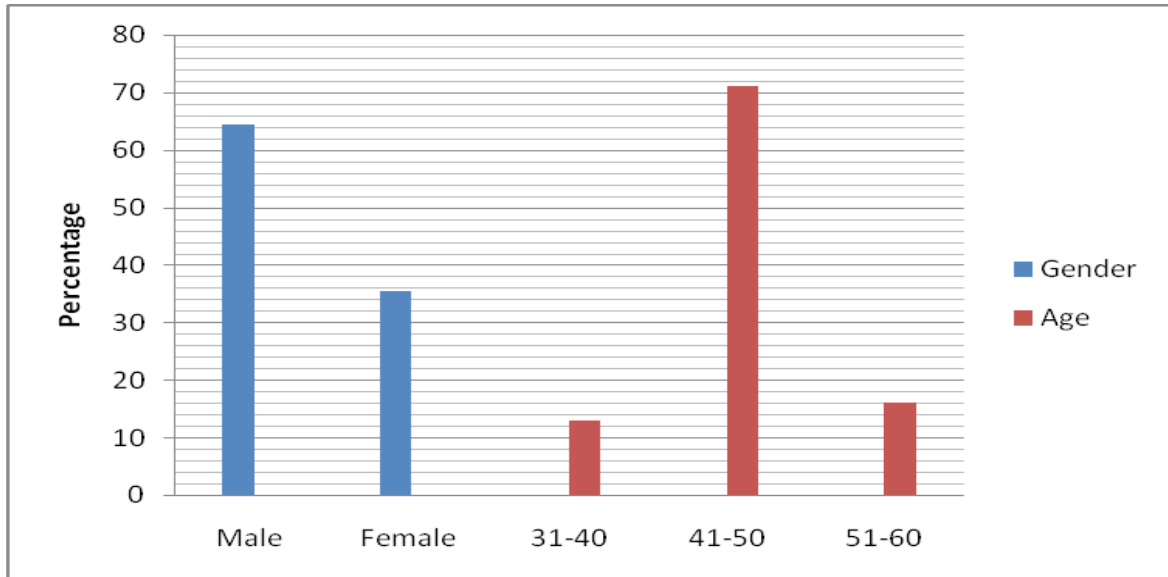
Figure 4.1 Respondents Gender and Age

Source: Survey data (2012)

4.3 Education

The study established that government communication rests on not only experienced but well trained hands and thus any shortcomings cannot be on account of inexperience or skills deficiency but other factors as discussed in Chapter Five. The results of the survey showed that 40.3% of the respondents have attained a Bachelor' s Degree as their highest level of education while 37.1% have a Masters degree. Those with college diploma constituted 19.4% (Figure. 4.2).

Education

Percent	College Diploma	University (Bachelors)	Masters	Other (PGD)
	19.4	40.3	37.1	3.2
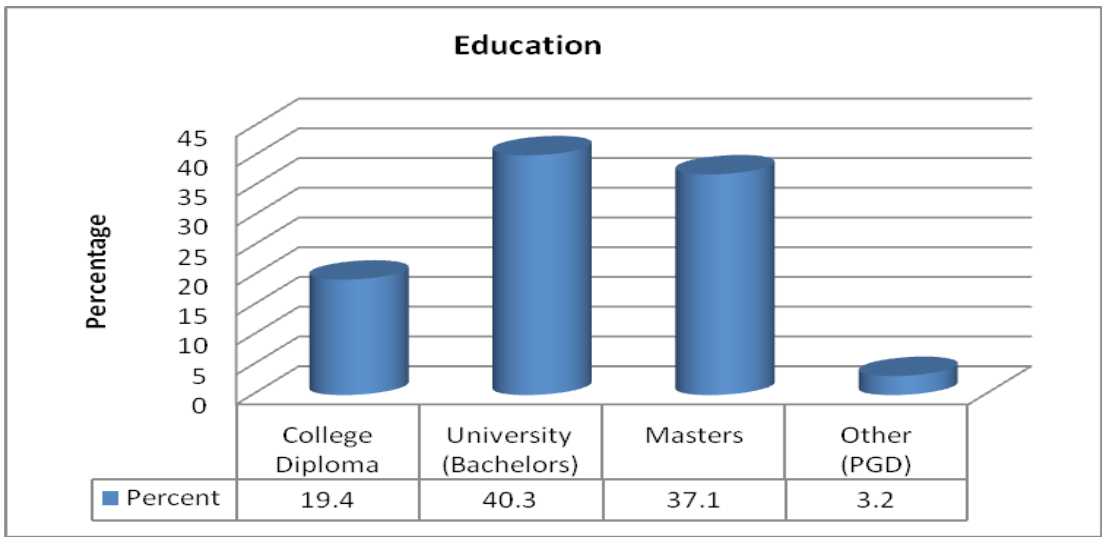
Figure 4.2: Level of Education

4.4 Crisis Occurrences

It emerged that organizations are quite vulnerable to crisis and should have established formal structures to prevent and manage crises. This is demonstrated by majority of the respondents at 69.4% who indicated that their organizations have experienced either a crisis or an emergency with potential for crisis in the past one year. Minority constituting 27.4% indicated they had not. The rest 3.2% were not aware. Figure 4.3 shows the distribution in the number of repondents indicating the status of crisis occurences in their organizations.
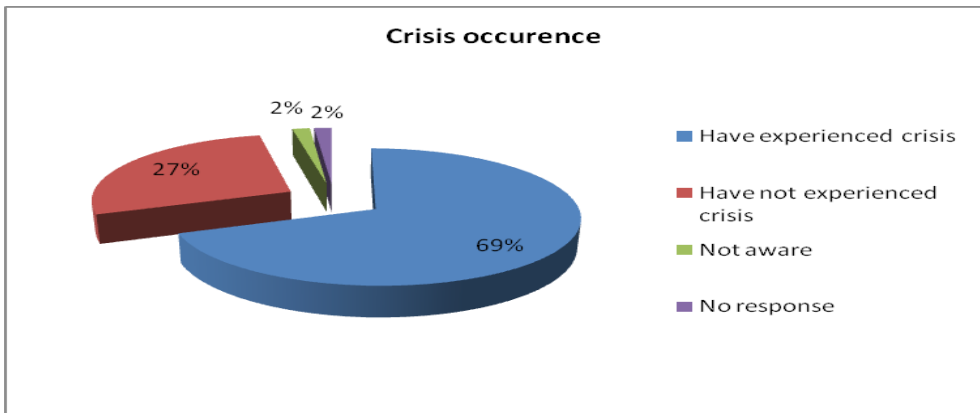
Figure 4.3 Crisis occurrences

4.5 Communication Strategies

This study found out that communication strategies currently existing in government may not be helpful in the event of a crisis. They were not done with crisis in mind. Asked whether their organizations have communication strategies, majority of the respondents 58.1% were positive while 37.1% were negative. Only 4.8% said they were not aware. Out of those who indicated they have the strategies, 33.9% had a component of crisis communication. The rest comprising 56.5% said their communication strategies did not have such a component and 9.7% were not aware if it was there or not. Figure 4.4 indicates the percentage of respondents whose organizations have communication strategies and those that have a component of crisis communication.

Figure 4.4 Communication strategies

4.6 Crisis Management Structures

At total of 36 respondents representing 58.1% indicated that their respective ministries had put in place certain measures or structures towards crisis management (Table 4.1). However, 22 of the respondents representing 35.5% said no such structures were in place. A small number of 6.5% did not respond to the question. These findings show that a significant number of Ministries do not have any crisis management structures and are therefore vulnerable to reputation damage in the event of a crises.

Table 4.1: Crisis management structures

	Frequency	Per cent
Crisis response structures in place	36	58.1%
No crisis response structures in place	22	35.5%
No response	4	6.5%

4.7 Spokespersons

Different voices are likely to emerge to communicate during crisis with the risk of giving conflicting information hence exacerbating the crisis. This is because majority of the ministries do not have a single nominated spokesperson who is thoroughly briefed on crisis communication. This is according to 48.4% of the respondents. Only 35.5% said they have a spokesperson while some 14.5% indicated they were not aware if such a person(s) exists (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Organizational spokespersons

	Frequency	Per cent
Have spokespersons	22	35.5%
No spokesperson	30	50.0%
Not aware	9	14.5%
No response	1	1.6%

4.8 Communication through Media

The respondents were asked if they have ever learnt of newsworthy occurrences in their organization through the Media. The results by 43.5% were yes while 37.1% said it happened sometimes. Only 17.7% said it never happens. This means that the PRO may not be always considered as the key link between the organization and the Media. Figure 4.5 shows the frequency distribution of respondents indicating whether they receive news

about their organization through the Media without having been involved in their dissemination.
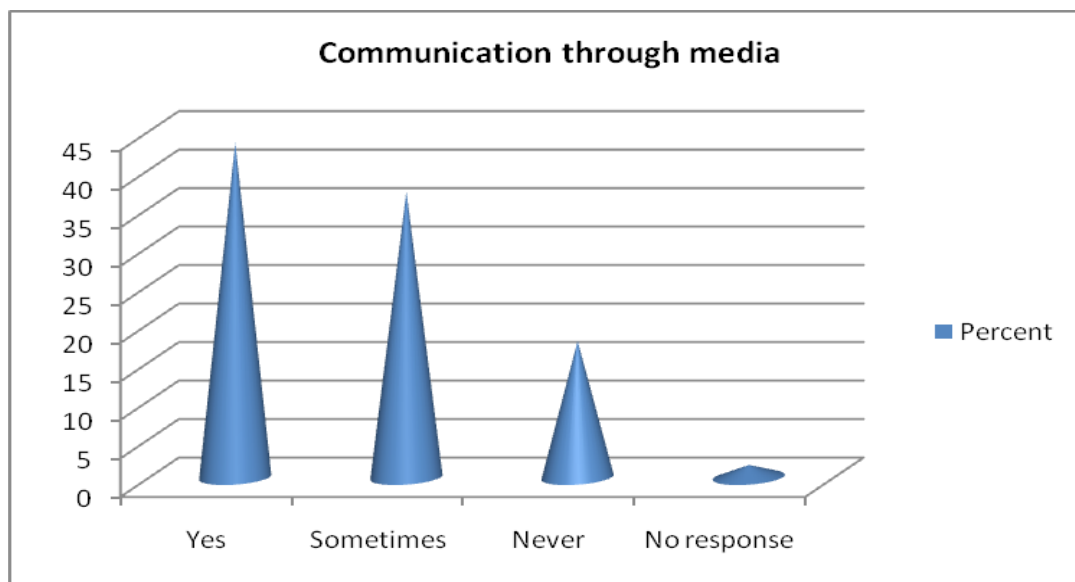
Figure 4.5 Communication through media

4.9 Roles and Responsibilities of PROs

The survey sought to find out what roles and responsibilities are undertaken by PROs. Virtually all PROs were found to handle media relations often at 98.4% with the exception of only one respondent who indicated that he/she does so rarely (Figure 4.6). This fact is also captured quite succinctly in the *Public Sector Communications Policy and Strategy (2012)* which states that communication officers tend to over-emphasize mass-media presence at the expense of policy and institutional development. Other activities that scored highly as part of the PROs duties were administrative at 90%. Here respondents were asked about their frequency of attending management meetings. Managing internal and external communications had 87% response while events

management had 85.5%. Speech writing was 84%. Activities that were rarely undertaken were serving as Personal Assistants at 11.3% and Corporate Social Responsibility Programmes at 17.8%.
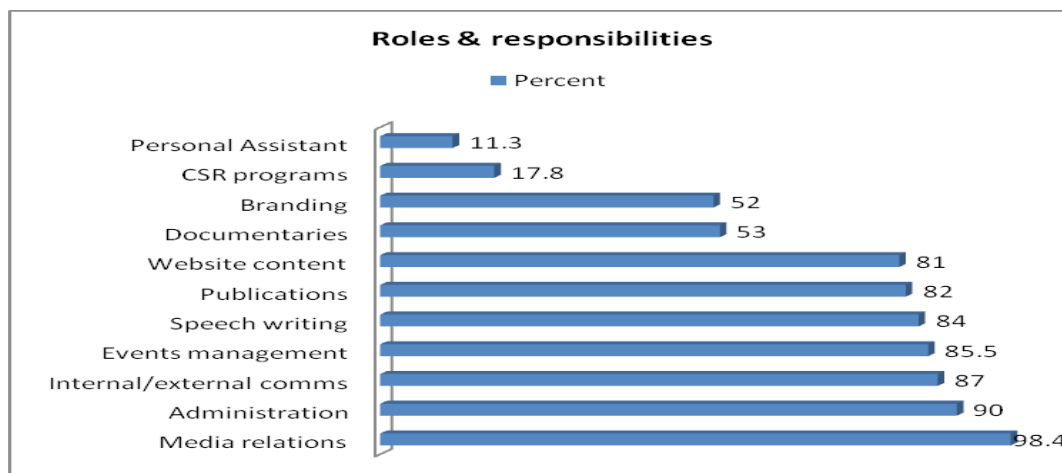
Figure 4.6: Roles and responsibilities

4.10 Membership to Decision-Making Committees

In an ideal situation, the head of PR should be a member of the top decision making organ of an organization given that decisions taken must be communicated somehow either internally or externally. However, asked whether members of such decision were making committees, the results were; 75.8% were members while 24.2% were not (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Membership to decision-making committees

	Per cent of membership
Member	75.8%
Non membership	24.2%

4.11 Membership to Crisis Management Teams

It emerged from the study that the role of public relations is crisis management may not be well understood given that a significant 43.5% of the respondents are not members of crisis management teams (Table 4). A simple majority of 54.8% indicated they were members of either an ad hoc or a permanent crisis management teams though ideally, all of them should be.

Table 4.4: Membership to Crisis Management Teams

	Frequency	Per cent
Members	34	54.8%
Non members	27	43.5%

4.12   Reporting Mechanisms

The survey sought to establish, to whom the heads of public communication units report to in their organizations. According to the results, 69.4% reports to the Permanent Secretary (who are the Chief Executive Officers) while 21% report to Directors (Figure. 4.7). Only 1.6% indicated they reported to Cabinet Ministers while the rest, constituting 8.1%, reported to other senior officials. This means that a significant 30% do not report to the Chief Executive and counsel the organization leaders as stipulated in the Mexican Statement referred to in Chapter Two.
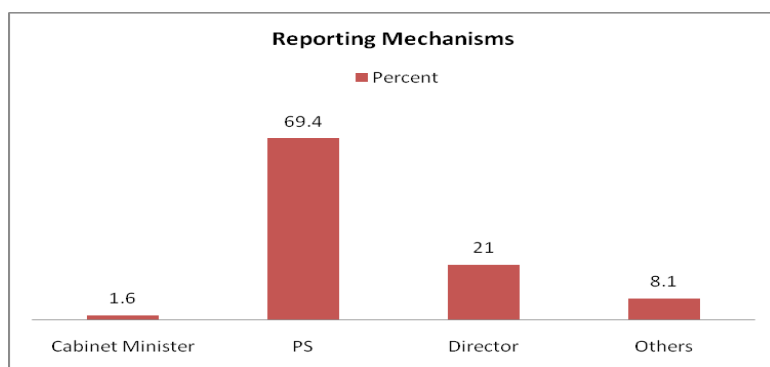
Figure 4.7: Reporting mechanisms

4.13 Public Communications Budget

Majority of government PROs are dependants when it comes to budget allocation with 88.7% indicating they do not have a budget of their own. Thus they depend on the magnanimity of the budget controllers for funding. Only a mere 11.3% have a budget allocation (Figure 4.8).

Budget

■ Have budget   ■ No budget

11%

89%
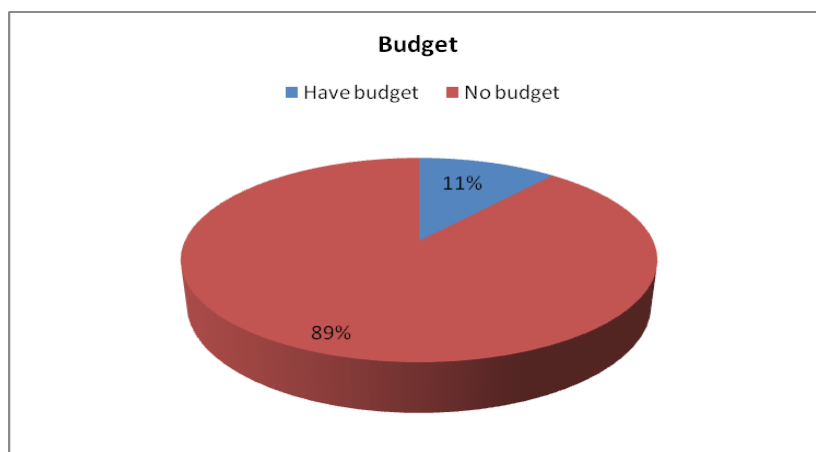
Figure 4.8: PR Budgets

4.14 Number of PROs per Ministry

These findings show that Ministries are critically understaffed in PR, notwithstanding the myriad duties they are supposed to undertake. The survey sought to find out how many PR professionals are deployed in each of the government Ministries and the results showed that 21% had three, 38.7% had two while 30.6% had only one officer. Only 9.7% said they had four and above. Further, a high of 82% said the number was inadequate to handle the communications workload. Those who said the number was enough were only

16.2% while one respondent (1.6%) felt the number was somewhat adequate. Figure 4.9 shows the correlation between the number of PROs in Ministries and opinion on their adequacy.
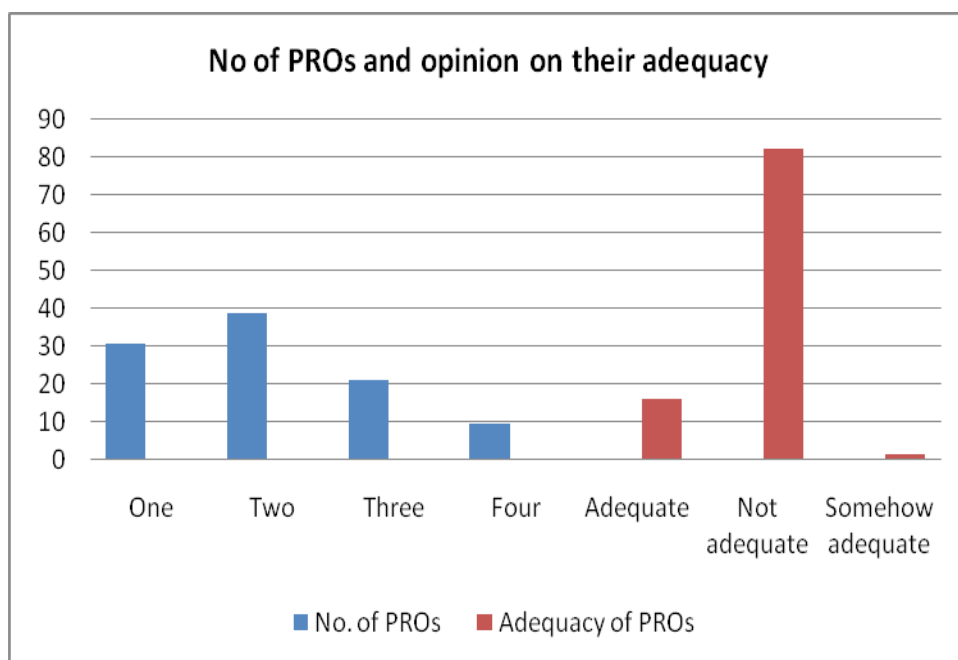
Figure 4.9: Number of PROs per Ministry

4.15 Perceptions

How are PRO perceived by the management and staff in their organizations? According to the results as shown in Figure 4.10; 43.5% of the respondents feel they are perceived as communication specialists' core to the organization; 22.5% as part of the administrative functionaries; 13% as the spokesperson(s) of their organization and 21% as Press agents. These findings suggest that there is no clear understanding across ministries on who exactly is a PRO and what are his/her duties.
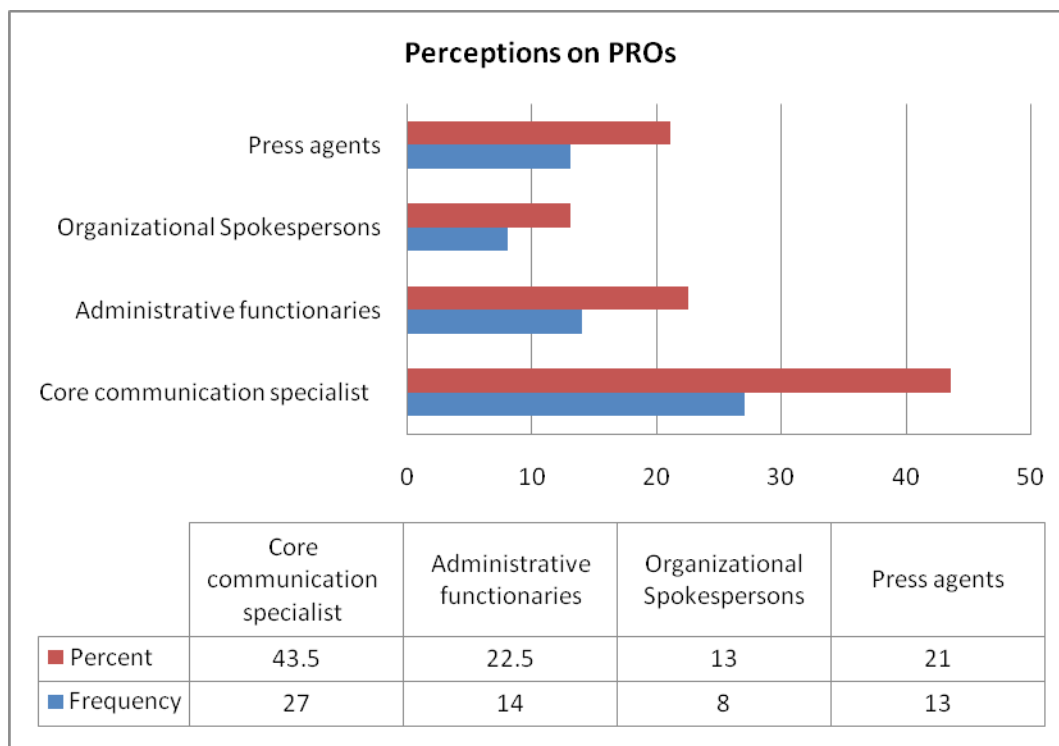
Figure 4.10: Perceptions of PRO's by Management and Staff

4.16 Government's **handling of Crisis Communication**

Majority of PROs in government feels that the way government handles crisis communication is not effective. Asked to give their opinion on the statement that "Government handles crisis communication effectively", 42% disagreed with the statement while 24% could neither agree nor disagree. A sizable 23% agreed with the statement while a small number of 1.6% strongly disagreed. The majority opinion points at a lack of ownership of the communication process by the very professionals whose core mandate is to communicate. Figure 4.11shows the respondents' opinion on how effectively government handles crisis communication.
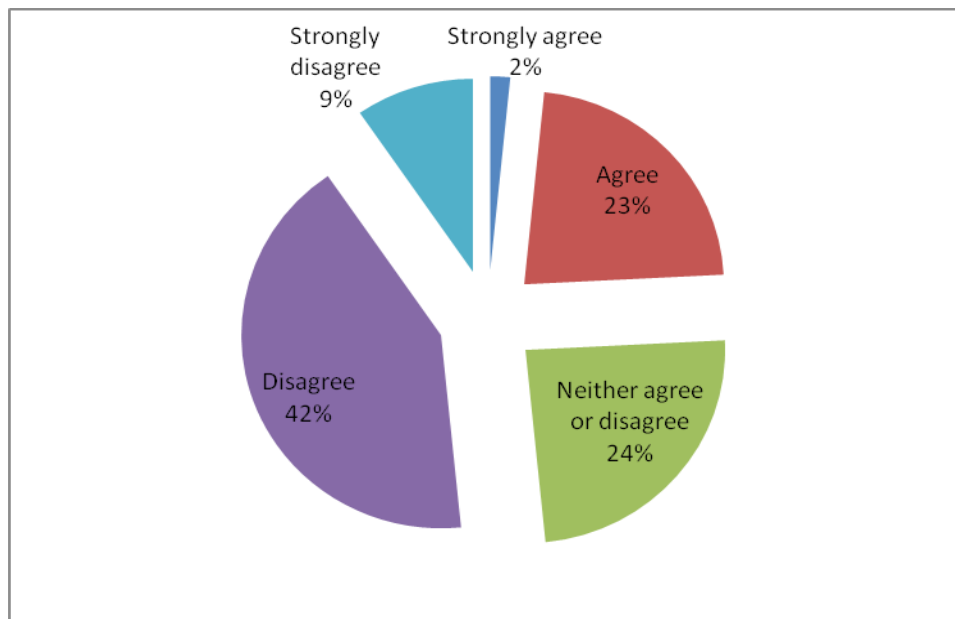
Figure 4.11: Handling of Crisis Communications

4.17 Summary

This Chapter explored the environment in which crisis is management in the public sector starting with the demographics of the professionals in whose domain public communication rests. It unpacked the PR officers in government; their education, experience and technical skills. The Chapter also analysed the existing approaches available for handling crisis communication. Among them are the communication strategies, crisis management structures, organization spokespersons and how the organizations communicate with the Media.

In order to establish how effective the PR units were in crisis management, the Chapter examined what the PRO do on a day to day basis. The aim was to establish if crisis communication is part of their core business. The Chapter also investigated were on how

much PROs were involved in critical decision-making and policy organs of their respective organizations, including their membership to crisis management teams where such structures exist and whom they report to in the organizational hierarchy. Finally, the Chapter looked as the factors that influence the approaches used in managing corporate communications including crisis management. This covered critical factors such as budget allocation, manpower adequacy and how PROs are perceived by the management and staff. Their opinion on whether government handles crisis communication effectively was a useful barometer in shedding light on why certain approaches are in place and if they work.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The preceding Chapter focused on presenting and analysing the results of the survey on PROs in Kenya public service in the context of crisis communication. This Chapter brings out what the findings of the study mean towards enhancing understanding of the landscape in which crisis communication is handled. The researcher discusses various opportunities that exist in the public sector to effectively handle crisis communications and the weaknesses that contribute the current scenarios.

5.2 Discussion of findings

The following discussions cover four broad areas based on the findings of the study. These are the general profile of the PRO practitioner, the current crisis communication structures, the role of the PROs in government and the independence, clout and capacity that these professional have.

5.2.1 Demographics

The demographics of the 62 Public Communications officers in Government, demonstrates that public relations in government is in the hands of middle-aged professionals who are in their 30's and 40's. Further, the findings show that the PROs are well educated with 77.4 % of them having attained at least a university degree (Figure 4.1) with industry related skills. By all standards, with such calibre of professionals, the

Government meets the basic threshold of skilled manpower comparable to any other in different sectors. This correlates with Tikolo (2011) study which found that 57.5% of in-house PROs in Kenya had a Masters Degree, while 35% had a Bachelor's degree and 7.5% held a diploma. It disabuses the notion of skills and experience deficiency being the cause of poor public perceptions of government PROs as not being at par with similar professionals in other sectors.

5.2.2 Crisis Communication Structures

It is clear that government ministries are not immune from crisis and emergency situations. As high as 69.4% of the respondents confirmed that their ministries had experienced crisis or at least an emergency situation with potential for crisis. With such high possibilities of a crisis, the question is why formal structures to not only manage crises but also take pro-active measures in crises management should not already been set up. In a section of government represented by 58% of the respondents, communication strategies exist to provide guidance on how to approach crisis communication. The only problem is that in those ministries, only a small number represented by 35% of the respondents indicated that they had a component of crisis communication. Leaving out crisis communication in an organizational strategy deprives the management team a crucial tool that would help it navigate through a crisis without incurring too much damage to its image and reputation.

It is however worth noting that certain measures are taken to ensure that there are crisis response mechanisms in place. According to 57.8% per cent of the respondents, some of the approaches used in responding to crisis include ad hoc crisis management teams.

These could be useful to help the organization in times of crisis but may not be helpful in averting a crisis as they are mainly reactive as opposed to proactive approaches which prevent the occurrence of a crisis in the first place. Fearn-Banks (2002) asserts, regardless of the size of an organization, a crisis communication plan is needed.

The position of the organizational spokesperson seems hazy to majority of the PROs. At least half of all the respondents (48.4%) indicated that their organizations do not have anyone who is thoroughly briefed on crisis communication to play the role (Table 4.2). Some 14.5% were not even aware if such as person exists in their organization. This means majority of the organizations are quite exposed to double trouble in the event of a crisis. Firstly, because of the crisis itself and secondly, different voices may emerge to communicate. This approach presents the risk of giving conflicting information hence exacerbating the crisis.

5.2.3 Role of the Public Relations Officer

It is also instructive to note from the study that PROs are not always involved when disseminating information through the media as shown in Figure 4.5 where 80.6% said it happens. PROs are not the spokespersons of the organization and other functionaries can provide media with information. This however does not negate the fact that the PROs are purposefully employed to handle corporate communications. If they frequently stumble on news released from their organization to the media, then this is likely to cast doubts on whether the roles of these professionals are recognized by the management. It may also be pointer to the fact that other departments or staff may be usurping the public relations docket. Ultimately, even in the likely occurrence of an emergency or crisis, the PRO is

likely to be more of a behind the scenes player than in the main cast. However, as (Jefkins, 1998) cautions, that the person who is likely to understand how media works and has established a relationship with the media and is generally perceived as one of them is the best person to deal with them.

The findings showed substantial bias towards media relations work among PROs and this has created wrong perceptions that they are merely journalists in residence. The study examined what they do on a day to day basis with the results showing media relations at 98.4% of the respondents, administrative duties (90%) and internal/external communications at 87%. However, activities such as production of documentaries, corporate branding and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes were undertaken by just about half of the officers. These findings are consistent with the Public Information Model explained in Chapter Two. Administrative duties also tend to take a lot of the PROs time indicating it is part of their work schedule. This could be at the expense of core functions such as website content development which should ideally be actively undertaken with equal frequency as media relations. When it comes to CSR, the PROs indicated it is not one of their core functions with those undertaking it at 17.8%. It can be argued that government by its very nature undertakes public programmes and projects and therefore does not have to duplicate the same through CSR. The PR units need to strike a balance in performing all their core functions without emphasis on some at the expense of others affects their effectiveness.

When it comes to other decision-making committees a high number of 75.8% of PROs are members (Figure 4.3). This contrasts with the 54.8% of respondents who said they

were members of either ad hoc or permanent crisis management teams. Membership to decision making organs presented the high number of PROs with a platform to influence decisions. Still the question that begs answers is why any organization would leave out PROs in such crucial teams where effective communication is so critical. Black, (2009) suggests that key members of a crisis management team should include the chief executive and the head of public relations regardless of the issues under crisis. Hence the requisite threshold for PROs membership to such committees should be 100% to make them effective.

5.2.4 Independence, Capacity and Clout

Generally, where head of a specific cadre of professionals is placed in the organizational hierarchy is an important indicator of the clout that the office wields in policy making and implementation. What emerges from the study is that PROs report to diverse offices but more significantly to the Permanent Secretary at 69.4%. The rest reports to other offices and not to the PS who is the Chief Executive. The PR manager needs to be positioned such that he or she is responsible to top management and serves all departments of the organization ideally at the level of director of the board (Jefkins, 1998). Given that government ministries are fairly bureaucratic entities, officers reporting at lower levels may be excluded in critical decision making organs even in times of crisis. This may not be helpful in pushing the agenda of their departments by virtue of their lower positions in the organizational pecking order thus compromising their effectiveness.

Allocation and control over budget that an office has is a good indicator of the independence it has over planning and implementing of its programs. Asked if the PR

units have budget that they control, a whopping 89% of the respondents indicated they did not have an allocation specific to public relations. This is an important factor that determines efficiency and independence of the public communication outfits. Without a dedicated budget, these professionals may find it difficult to mount well planned and long term PR programmes including crisis prevention. This is especially so if the budget holder perceives public communications as a non-priority activity for the organization. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that that the numbers of PROs per ministry were below the optimal requirements to handle the workload. The mean score was only two professional PROs per ministry across government. This is way below what a fully functional PR office should have when one takes into the account multiple functions that these professional are supposed to undertake.

The other important determinant factor is that PROs are not fully confident that the management and staff fully recognize them as communication specialists who are core to the organizations. From the results, close to half of the PROs sampled felt they are perceived as administrative functionaries and press agents (Figure 4.10). It is possible that management and staff perceive PROs by what they see them doing and not necessary what they are professionally supposed to do. This perception explains why their membership is not invited to key teams some that require communications. Majority of them display lack of ownership of the crisis communication structures in place. Only a meagre 23% are convinced that government handles crisis communication effectively while the rest had different levels of misgiving. This is significant given that PROs should be in the frontline in the defence of government communications.

5.3 Summary of Findings

The aim of the study was to examine management of crisis communication in the public sector focusing on the role of Public Relations Officers. The specific objectives were, to assess current crisis management approaches in the public sector in Kenya; to examine the effectiveness of public relations departments in crisis management and to analyse the factors that determine such approaches and effectiveness of the public communications departments in crisis management.

Data collection was done in the form of questionnaires which were administered to Public Relations Officers in all the government Ministries with a 73% response rate. The data collected was edited, coded and analysed using descriptive statistics. A descriptive analysis of all variables was provided in the form of means, percentages and frequency distributions. The results of the findings were presented charts, tables and graphs.

The key findings of this study were that government ministries have not sufficiently integrated public relations activities into their operations. The PR establishments are relatively weak with insufficient policy guidelines, resources and manpower to carry out effective PR programs. This has consigned the PR practitioners to undertake short term activities as opposed to long term programmes. Besides, there are no clear institutional structures to handle crisis management and by extension, crisis communication.

5.4 Conclusions

The key conclusion drawn from this study is that crisis communication is not a strategic activity within the public sector. The professionals responsible for communication are

themselves not an integral part of the strategic management process in the organizations. This scenario points to an entrenched organizational culture in government that has so far failed to place public relations high in its priority list of key departments. This has led to lack of coherence in the overall public communications especially when faced with crisis situations that demand clear, concise and immediate communications.

The public sector in Kenya does not have effective policy guidelines on crisis communication and this is a major impediment when it comes to crisis communication. Even though majority of the organizations have communication strategies, only a few of them have a component of crisis communication. There is a glaringly lack of formal and clear guidelines for action when a crisis situation presents itself with many relying on other measures such as ad hoc teams to manage crisis. Where some forms of crisis management structures exist it is evident that the public relations officers are not key actors in these structures.

A substantial bias towards media relations work among PROs in government is quite apparent and this has created the impression that PR practitioners are merely press liaison officers. Further, given that their capacities are below the optimal requirements to handle the workload, the PROs are not in a position to accomplish multiple tasks of PR and are likely to choose that which is within their limited human and financial disposal. A significant number of PR Officers are not in positions of authority to influence major policy decision or actions. This arises from the fact that they do not control their budgets, others do not report to the Chief Executives and their position in the organizational hierarchy is low.

5.5 Recommendations

Two key recommendations are made out this study in the areas of policy and administrative actions;

   i.   Policy Improvement

From the findings of this study, the Government should come with a clear communication policy and strategy to manage public communications. Such policy should provide direction on matters such as crisis communication and also address the issues of the organizations spokespersons. The proposed *National (Public Sector) Communication, Proposed: Policy and Strategy Manual*, (2012) is a great step towards this direction and should be adopted by all public service institutions. As matter of policy, government ministries should have formal crisis management structures that encompass crisis communication. Further, the existing communication strategies in different ministries should be reviewed with the aim of harmonizing their public communication approaches to create communication orderliness in the entire public service sector. The findings thus bring out the pressing need to review the current communication strategies in government with the aspect of crisis in mind.

Administrative Actions **Figure 4.11: Handling of Crisis Communications**

  ii.

The government should undertake administrative reforms in the manner the public relations functions are integrated into the Ministries operations. In particular, the Ministry in charge of public communications should review the capacity of the capacity of the PR outfits with the aim of empowering them with optimal qualified staff and dedicated

budget allocation. Heads of public relations should be placed at par with other heads of departments in order to give them clout and inclusion in critical decision makings organs of the organizations. In addition, the government should review the reporting mechanism in government to make it possible for the heads of PR to report to the Chief Executives. This is to ensure that critical advice is received as the highest echelons of the organization which is the public face of the organization. The Ministry in charge of Information and Communications should revise the PROs schedule of duties and having it applied across government. The schedules should focus on the core mandate of public communication to help the government achieve mutual understanding with its publics. This could also be supplemented by a sensitization program of the top management in government ministries to understand the roles of PROs in the national development agenda and support it both financially and logistically.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Research

Owing to the limitations of this study, it is suggested that similar research could be done to cover all public sector organizations such the State Corporations and statutory boards. It could be extended to the regional public offices countrywide given that under the current devolved system of government, the County government are the new structures of governance in focus. The study would bring out the contrasts in the practices of crisis management in County government and the National government and thus provide a clear understanding of the problem across the entire public sector. A similar study should be conducted to cover other public servants especially those in the organization's management. This is based on the understanding that crisis management and

communication is not a sole preserve of the PROs and that there are others involved. Such a study would bring out a deeper understanding on the challenges that face government crisis management and communication.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

My name is Mwangi Gakunga, a Masters Student in Communication Studies at the Moi University. I request for your valuable time to fill out this questionnaire. The questionnaire is highly simplified to enable you to respond with ease and in a short time. The information that you provide will assist in my research which is about the place of Public Relations Officers (PROs) in crisis communication in Kenya's Civil Service.

Your responses are confidential and strictly for research purposes only. I am therefore requesting for your honest and candid responses.

SECTION A: RESPONDENT'S PROFILE

Mark [X] where appropriate

1. Gender :   Male [   ]   Female [   ]

2. Age Bracket

    21 – 30 [   ]   31 - 40 [   ]   41 - 50 [   ]   51 – 60   [   ]

3. Highest educational level

        a.   Secondary school level   [   ]
        b.   College   (Diploma)   [   ]
        c.   University (Bachelors)   [   ]
        d.   University (Masters)   [   ]

e. Other

(Specify) ....

....

4. What was your area of study in (3) above?

    a) Journalism   [   ]

    b) Public Relations   [   ]

    c) Communication   [   ]

    d) Sociology   [   ]

    e) Education   [   ]

    f) Marketing   [   ]

    g) Other

    (specify)..

....

5. Do you have additional training relevant to Public Communication?

    Yes [   ]   None [   ]

6.   If   **yes**   to   the   above,   please
    specify ....
....

SECTION B: PLANNING FOR CRISIS COMMUNICATION

7.   Which of the following statements, in your opinion, **BEST** defines crisis communication?

(Tick any TWO statements only)

  i.   An unplanned communication that is an undoing of an unpleasant situation [   ]

  ii.   The role of Public Relations officer is to ensure crises do not occur   [   ]

 iii.   A proactive role of management   [   ]

  iv.   An activity that happens only after an unexpected occurrence   [   ]

v.   A management function that should be done long before a crisis occurs   [   ]

vi.   Engaging the media to avert any possible negative publicity   [   ]

8. Has your organization experienced any crisis or an emergency with potential for crisis in

the past one year?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

9.Has your organization conducted any Public Relations/ communications audit?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]   Not Aware [   ]

10. Does the organization have a communication strategy?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]   Not aware [   ]

11. If **yes**, does it have a component of crisis communication?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]   Not aware [   ]

12. What structures and measures are in place towards crisis management?

(Tick where appropriate)

i.   Standing crisis committee   [   ]

ii.   Crisis centre/office   [   ]

iii.   Staff crisis training   [   ]

iv.   Crises management plan   [   ]

v.   Ad hoc crisis management team   [   ]

vi.   None   [   ]

vii.   Others (specify)

....

....

SECTION C: THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICERS

13. What kind of activities is the Public Communication office in your organization involved in among the list below? Please indicate how often as follows;

Very often (**VO**);   Often (**O**);   Rarely (**R**);   Never (**N**)

		VO	**O**	**R**	**N**
a)	Media relations (i.e. writing press releases, press supplements, press invitations, press conferences, media monitoring etc.)				
b)	Speech writing				
c)	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes				
d)	Administrative duties (i.e. attending management meetings, etc.)				
e)	Events management				
f)	Production of publications				
g)	Production of documentaries				
h)	Corporate Branding				
i)	Website content development and management				
j)	Managing both internal and external communications				
k)	Serving as Personal Assistant				

14. Is the head of Public Communication a member of the top decision-making committee(s) of the organization?

Yes   [   ]   No [   ]

15. To whom does the head of Public Communications report to in your organization?

a) Cabinet Minister   [   ]

b) Permanent Secretary   [   ]

c) Director   [   ]

d) Others

    (specify)...

    ....

16. What level of seniority is the head of Public Communications in your organization?

a) Top management (Job group P and above)   [   ]

b) Middle level management (Job group M & N)   [   ]

c) Technical cadre (Job group L and below)   [   ]

d) Other (specify)...

17. Do the PROs have a schedule of duty?

Yes   [   ]   No [   ]

18. If **yes**, does it have a component on how to handle communication in the event of a crisis or emergency?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

19. Have you been a member of the organization's ad hoc or permanent crisis management team?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

20. Does the organization have a single nominated spokesperson who is thoroughly briefed

on crisis communication?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]   Not aware [   ]

21. If **yes** to the above, who is your organization's spokesperson?

....

22. In your view, how are Public Communications officers generally perceived by the rest of the staff in your organization?

(Mark 1 – 7 in order of priority)

i.   As core to the public communications needs of the organization   [   ]
ii.   As communication specialists of the organization   [   ]
iii. As part of general administrative functions   [   ]
iv.   As mainly serving the top management   [   ]

v.   As the spokesperson(s) of the organization   [   ]

vi.   As Press agents   [   ]
vii. Other ....   [   ]

23. Are there incidences where you learnt of newsworthy occurrences in your organization from the media yet it was communicated from your organization without involving you?

Yes [   ]   Sometimes [   ]   Never [   ]

24. In your opinion, is the role of the Public Communications in your organization recognized by both management and staff?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]   Somehow/Sometimes [   ]

25. Does the Public Communications department have its own budget which it controls?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

26. If **yes** to the above, describe the level of funding provided for Public Communications programmes in your organization.

Highly adequate [   ]   Adequate [   ] Inadequate [   ]   Highly inadequate [   ]

27. How many professionally trained PCO's are in your Organization?

....
....

28. In your opinion, is the number (above) adequate to handle the public communications workload of your organization?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]   Somehow [   ]

29. "Government ministries and department handles crisis communication effectively". To what extent do you agree?

Strongly agree   [   ]   Agree [   ]   Neither agree nor disagree [   ]
        Disagree [   ]
Strongly disagree [   ]

Thank you once again for taking part in this study.

MWANGI GAKUNGA.

Appendix 2 List of Ministries and Respondents

MINISTRY		Target No of PROs	Respondents
Office of the President	Defence	1	1
	Special Programmes	2	2
	Provincial Administration	2	1
Office of the Vice President	Home Affairs	3	1
	Immigration & Registration of Persons	2	2
Office of the Prime Minister	PM Office	3	1
	State for Public Service	2	2
	Dev of Northern Kenya	1	1
	Planning, National Dev & Vision 2030	2	2
Agriculture		2	2
Co-operative Dev & Marketing		2	2
	Copyright Board	1	1
East Africa Community		2	1
Education		2	2
Energy		3	2
Environment & Mineral Resources		2	2
Finance		1	1
	Pensions Department	1	1
Fisheries Development		1	1
Foreign Affairs		2	1
Forestry and Wildlife		2	1
Gender & Children Affairs		1	1
National Heritage & Culture		2	1
Higher Education, Science & Technology		2	2
Housing		1	1
Industrialization		3	1
Information & Communications		2	1

	Kenya Film Censorship Board	1	1
Justice, Ntl Cohesion & Constitutional Affairs		1	1
	National Cohesion Department	1	1
Labour		2	2
Lands		1	1
Livestock Development		1	1
Local Government		2	1
Medical Services		1	1
Nairobi Metropolitan Development		1	1
Public Health & Sanitation		3	2
	Public Service Commission	1	1
Public Works		2	1
Regional Development Authorities		2	1
Roads		2	2
	State Law office	2	1
Tourism		2	2
Trade		1	1
Transport		2	2
Water & Irrigation		1	1
Youth Affairs & Sports		2	1
Other (redeployed)		4	0
Total		**85**	**62**

Appendix 3: Research Authority

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Telegrams: "SCIENCETECH", Nairobi
Telephone: 254-020-241349, 2213102
254-020-310571, 2213123
Fax: 254-020-2213215,318245, 318249
When replying please quote

P. O. Box 30623-00100
NAIROBI-KENYA
Website: www.ncst.go.ke

Our Ref:

Date:

NCST/RRI/12/1/SS-011/1609

5th December, 2011

John Mwangi Gakunga
Moi University
P.O BOX 3900
ELDORET

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

Following your application for authority to carry out research on "*Crisis communication in the Kenyan public sector: A critical look at the place of public relations officers*" I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research **in Nairobi Province** for a period ending *31st December, 2012.*

You are advised to report to **the Permanent Secretaries of all the selected Ministries in Kenya** before embarking on the research project.

On completion of the research, you are expected to submit **one hard copy and one soft copy** of the research report/thesis to our office.

Dr. M. K. Rugutt, Ph.D HSC
DEPUTYCOUNCIL SECRETARY

Copy to:

The Permanent Secretaries
All the selected Ministries in Kenya
NAIROBI

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:

Prof./Dr./Mr./Mrs./Miss....JOHN..MWANGI...........

....GAKUNGA.........

of (Address) ....MOI..UNIVERSITY....................

.P...O...BOX...3900,.ELDORET...........................

has been permitted to conduct research in ....

....Location,

....NAIROBI.........District,

....NAIROBI......Province,

on the topic..CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN THE

KENYAN PUBLIC SECTOR:A CRITICAL LOOK

AT THE PLACE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

OFFICERS..

....

for a period ending..31st.DECEMBER....,20...12.

PAGE 3

Research Permit No.NCST./RRI/12/1/SS011/1609

Date of issue....5th..SECEMBER..2011............

Fee received..KSHS..1000...............................

....
Applicant's   Secretary
Signature   National Council for
                                 Science and Technology

Appendix 4 Research Permit

Appendix 5: Scheme of Service For Public Communication Officers

formulation and co-ordination of National Information Policy; carrying out research on general public opinion on the Government and providing appropriate strategies to address the situation; providing advisory services on all matters relating to capacity of the information infrastructure; coordinating all information services locally and outside the country; and publishing periodicals and ad hoc magazines and newsletters.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS FUNCTION

The Public Communications Function entails identifying significant events which require packaging of Government information for dissemination to the media and public; advising the Government on the best media practices which promote good Government relations; organizing fora where Government policies, programmes and projects can be propagated and promoted; preparing and organizing media/press briefs on weekly or monthly basis; preparing media supplements, documentaries, press releases, features; advising Ministries/Department on matters of public communications and dissemination of information; carrying out research on public opinion on specific sectoral areas in the Government and providing appropriate strategies to address the situation; and formulation of National Public Communications Policy and design of a Government communications infrastructure.

4. GRADING STRUCTURE AND SCOPE

(a) Grading Structure

The Scheme of Service establishes nine (9) grades each in the Cadres of Public Communications Officers and Information Officers who will be designated and graded as follows:

Public Communications Officers Appendix 'A'

Designation	Job Group
Public Communications Officer III	'H'
Public Communications Officer II	'J'
Public Communications Officer I	'K'
Senior Public Communications Officer	'L'
Chief Public Communications Officer	'M'
Principal Information Communications Officer	'N'
Assistant Director of Public Communications	'P'
Senior Assistant Director of Public Communications	'Q'
Deputy Director of Public Communications	'R'