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A RESEARCH REPORT BY:
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TITLE: An exploratory qualitative study on the processes followed when developing crisis communication strategies at a Mpumalanga based company.

Date of submission : 28 October 2020

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Thank you to my research supervisor Ms Alecia Fourie for insisting me during this whole process. Thank you to Quantum Energy CC for allowing me to conduct this research study on your organisation.

Abstract:

This is an exploratory qualitative study on the processes followed when developing crisis communication strategies at a Mpumalanga based company. Interpretivism paradigm allowed the researcher to gain in-depth understanding into this unique topic. Crisis communication management has become an integral part of the business environment for every organisation is vulnerable to a crisis. Communication is a purposeful process of conveying important information. The researcher wants to determine what Quantum Energy CC does to develop a crisis communication strategy.

The problem the researcher wants to solve is the lack of information when it comes to what practical steps organisations take in developing crisis communication strategies. This research study will attempt to determine what happens within the planning, executing and managing phases when developing crisis communication strategies in Quantum Energy by conducting semi-structured interviews with three participants. The research found that planning, executing and managing phases in crisis communication strategies development can assist Quantum Energy. Quantum Energy's practical steps used in developing crisis communication strategies were determined and the researcher found that continuous monitoring of implemented communication is crucial to ensure communication was received. The researcher suggests further studying into this topic in order to make a generalised statement regarding how to practically develop crisis communication strategies.

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1. Introduction:

1.1. Contextualisation:

The topic this research report will focus on is regarding the processes followed in the planning, executing and managing phases of developing crisis communication strategies within Quantum Energy CC, by means of a qualitative study". Crisis communication management has become an integral part of the business environment (Institute for Public Relations, 2007). Sufficient literature exists regarding crisis communication strategies for instance W. Timothy Coombs, (2015). However, there are gaps such as not focusing on the steps or process of developing crisis communication but rather on an approach of how to manage a crisis. Timothy Coombs', (2015) approach consists of three phases (precrisis, crisis event and postcrisis). Most available literature focuses more on crisis communication strategies once they are implemented. The researcher suggests by developing practical steps on how to communicate and manage a crisis it could help to improve the implementation of crisis communication strategies with internal and external stakeholders (Bernstein, 2015).

Crisis communication is increasingly researched in more detail (Coombs & Holladay, 2009). Some research suggests there are 10 steps to effective crisis communication such as discussed by Jonathan Bernstein, (2015). These steps are categorised into pre-crisis and post-crisis and suggests more practical ways of communicating in crisis situations therefore helping the researcher to determine practical steps to be taken. However, little literature is found on exact steps, processes and phases in developing crisis communication strategies.

1.2. Rationale:

Communication is a purposeful process of conveying information, ideas, or feelings between two or more people (Asemanyi, 2015). Crisis management is a crucial function for organisations as all organisations are susceptible to a crisis and it is therefore important to have crisis communication strategies or strategy formulating steps in place (Christensen, 2018). Having these steps and strategies in place allows

an organisation's communication team to be prepared for a crisis and even allow them to anticipate a crisis. Effective crisis communication requires planning to ensure the communication is transparent and inclusive. The British Petroleum (BP) oil spill is one of the most common public relations failure for not only did the company not take responsibility it did not communicate until a month later. The researcher has a degree in Corporate Communication which sparked interest in this integral part that public relations play in crisis communication (Jackson, 2007).

The researcher plans to investigate and analyse how organisations anticipate, prepare, execute and manage crisis and the communication surrounding such crisis which could affect organisation reputation. This is a topic worth researching as organisations form a big part of society, economy and the way an organisation handles a crisis (which depends on crisis communication strategies) can either destroy or enhance the organisation's reputation and profit (Jackson, 2007). With a crisis communication strategy in place it can reduce negative effects on stakeholders, the community and organisation, it can reduce unemployment and financial loss (Ramesh, 2009). By implementing a crisis communication strategy, it reduces stakeholder ambiguity and anxiety (Coombs, 2015). For example, by ensuring the crisis communication strategy is continuous, transparent, genuine and has a purpose establishes stakeholder trust (Zemke, 2020). If BP prepared in advance for a crisis such as an oil spill the organisation would have controlled the reputational damage and financial loss if the company had a planned out guide to how to communicate in crisis situations.

1.3. Problem statement:

Crisis communication management has become an integral part of the business environment (Institute for Public Relations, 2007). Literature exists regarding crisis communication strategies and the management thereof such as W. Timothy Coombs, (2015). However, there is a gap in the literature for it does not specifically look at the practical steps that could be used to develop a crisis communication strategy. Most literature focuses on crisis communication strategies in terms of anticipating the crisis, the crisis itself and post crisis. Crisis communication is increasingly being researched in more detail (Coombs & Holladay, 2009). A successful crisis communication strategy would take stakeholders into consideration, use social media as well as traditional

media (Agnes, 2016). To ensure shared meaning, crisis communication strategies should be pre- approved and evaluated by the public relations department (Agnes, 2016). Little literature is found on steps and phases in developing crisis communication strategies. The problem is that it is unclear which practical steps are followed in developing a crisis communication strategy within organisations, in this case, Quantum Energy CC.

1.4. Purpose statement:

The purpose of this research proposal is to identify which practical steps are used in the planning, executing and managing of crisis communication strategies within Quantum Energy CC. Researching this could possibly help determine the importance practical steps in developing crisis communication strategies for organisations like Quantum Energy CC before the crisis occurs, while the crisis is happening and after the crisis happened.

1.5. Research question and sub questions:

Main research question:

1. What processes are followed when developing a crisis communication strategy?

Sub-questions:

2. What steps take place in the planning and executing phases?
3. What steps are used to manage crisis communication strategies?

1.6. Objectives

1. To determine what takes place in the planning phase of crisis communication strategies.
2. To establish whether Quantum Energy CC has an executing phase for their crisis communication strategies.
3. To determine how Quantum Energy CC plans on managing crisis communication strategies that have been implemented.
4. To establish whether, continuous managing and monitoring of crisis communication strategies should take place.

2. Literature Review:

2.1. Conceptualisation:

	Concept	Definition	Conceptualisation
1	Crisis	Crisis can be categorised either as an event or process (Jaques, 2009). Definition by Coombs, (2015) a unpredictable event that can impact the expectations of stakeholders and the organisation's performance. A crisis usually has a negative outcome (Coombs, 2015).	Crisis in this research study refers to an event that influences an organisation's reputation, stakeholders and finances.
2	Practical steps	The actual doing of something, it also refers to a plan or method (du Plooy-Cilliers & Louw, 2019)	The process the public relations team uses to develop crisis communication strategies.
3	Crisis communication	A strategic approach to communicate with people such as stakeholders and publics when an organisation faces a crisis (Crocetti, 2018)	Communication to stakeholders through a medium for the sender (organisation) to inform them about a crisis and how the organisation plans to solve it.

4	Crisis communication strategies	Refers to communication that takes place to protect organisation reputation and there are two types namely; crisis response strategy and crisis timing strategies (Arpan and Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005).	The different ideas and plans the public relations team has in order to communicate information regarding a crisis to publics and stakeholders.
5	Planning Phase	Pre-crisis phases where identification, response and analysis is done with the aim to prevent a crisis from happening (Ioannou, 2015)	The proactive way of anticipating crisis that could possibly occur. The planning phase will develop strategies on how to solve the crisis as well as how these strategies will be communicated to stakeholder. Planning each aspect that can be affected by the crisis.
6	Executing Phase	Defined by project management as the longest phase in the project management lifecycle and consists of deliverables, monitoring,	How the public relations team plan on implementing the crisis communication strategy.

		controlling and reviewing (Ransom, 2020).	
7	Controlling	Control has different aspects such as monitoring and evaluating things like, employee performance and communicating targets(Littlejohn; Foss and Oetzel, 2017).	It is to have power over something in this case the crisis communication strategies and for the purpose of this research it will be combined in the managing phase.
8	Evaluating	Using a set of standards to determine whether a specific subject was worth doing or had significance(Littlejohn; Foss and Oetzel, 2017)..	When the public relations team determines by using set standers whether or not the implementation and execution of the crisis communication strategy was successful. This will be combined with controlling in the managing phase.
9	Managing Phase	This is included within the executing phase of project management and refers to determine if deliverables are reached which can track the progress of the project (Ransom, 2020).	Controlling and evaluating the perceived impact and success of the crisis communication strategies.

10	Importance	Having a significant value (Coombs & Holladay, 2009)	Something that is very important and has significant value.
11	Stakeholders	People that has an interest in an organisation that can either affect or be affected by the organisation, like investors, employees, suppliers and customers (Erasmus, Strydom, Rudansky-Kloppers; 2016)	Everyone who as an interest/ stake in the organisation.
12	Intangible assets	It is any an asset that lacks physical substance; and it is usually very hard to evaluate (Erasmus, et al., 2016).	An asset the organisation possesses that is not physical. For instance the organisation's reputation.
13	Reputation	Opinions or beliefs that are held by something or someone (Thiessen, Ingehoff, 2011).	Opinions or beliefs that people (stakeholders such as customers and suppliers) have of the organisation. It is also an intangible asset for any organisation
14	Crisis management	The process of controlling or preventing the damage that was caused by a crisis within an	Controlling and preventing any damage to the organisation,

		organisation (Institute for Public Relations, 2007).	stakeholders, reputation and image that was caused by a crisis within the organisation
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2.2. Theoretical Foundation

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) will be used. SCCT was developed to help crisis managers in managing the organisations' reputation during a crisis (Coombs, 2015). This theory has been used by several researchers to determine and assess crisis communication. The research wants to use this theory to help investigate crisis communication strategies' and the practical steps that could be used to help develop crisis communication strategies for Quantum Energy CC (Littlejohn; Foss and Oetzel, 2017).

This theory suggests that evidence-based framework can help protect the reputation of an organisation post-crisis communication (Murphy, 2015). This theory indicates that the public relations team should match the strategic crisis communication strategies to the level of the crisis and the reputational threat it brings with it (Murphy, 2015). If there was a threat like this at Quantum Energy it is not publicly known, or it had little to no impact on Quantum Energy's reputation. For example the communication of Tiger Brands and Enterprises during the Listeriosis outbreak was not planned strategically and strategies implemented to communicate with stakeholders led to big reputational damage for the companies (Johnston, 2018).

SCCT is best suited for this topic as processes in developing different communication strategies depend on different crisis situations. It is impossible to anticipate all types of crisis and develop communication strategies. Therefore, identify high risks and crisis scenarios that are likely to occur within the organisation (Bernstein, 2015). The researcher sees the importance of this theory because it will not only help with crisis communication strategies, but it will also remind organisations such as Quantum Energy that unplanned non-strategic communication can negatively affect the organisation's reputation. SCCT focuses on managing the crisis for not only the

stakeholders but the organisation as well. This can be done by reputation management and fast continues crisis communication strategies (messages) being sent out. This study focuses on the practical steps that can be taken in a crisis to ensure there is communication regarding the crisis by specifically focusing on Quantum Energy CC (Murphy, 2015).

There are four main crisis response communication strategies. Rebuilding strategy focuses on building trust with stakeholders again to try and redeem reputation, Diminish strategy, limiting the amount of responsibility placed on the organisation. This strategy shifts the blame away from the organisation. Bolster strategy show the stakeholders that the organisation is an asset to them. The strategy used by public relations team will depend on the type of crisis the organisation faces such as rebuilding strategy can be used by Enterprise and Tiger Brands to regain stakeholders trust. The communication strategy should include taking responsibility and how will they prevent something like Listeriosis to feature in their products again. By using the SCCT throughout the research it can help formulate the conclusion because it helps organisations prepare for crisis in advance, allows for less panicking when crisis arises, enables categorization of crisis and most importantly reminds the public relations team that public opinion does matter (Amaresan, 2019). The researcher would like to determine whether Quantum Energy has considered the four response strategies when developing their crisis communication strategies

Any organisation that faces a crisis has one aim which is to handle the crisis in order to reduce negative outcomes (Murphy, 2015). Timothy Coombs developed SCCT and is based in Attribution Theory because it deals with perception by the public regarding the organisation and how the crisis was handled (Murphy, 2015). The researcher believes that a well formulated crisis communication strategy can help an organisation such as Quantum Energy to keep a positive reputation. SCCT helps maintain reputation by providing strategies that organisations can choose from based on the feedback regarding the crisis communication (Murphy, 2015). For that reason the researcher will not only look at the phases of creating crisis communication strategy but also the strategy itself and determine what Quantum Energy current communication strategies are.

This theory will support the research topic by recognising perceived impact of crisis on all stakeholders, it promotes managing a crisis and preparing for a crisis (Murphy, 2015). This links to the planning, executing and managing phases as stipulated by Timothy Coombs which is the basis of this research study.

2.3. Previous literature

2.3.1. Crisis communication

This research study's focus is on crisis communication therefore, the textbook "Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing and Responding" by Timothy Coombs in 2015 forms a vital part and foundation for this research study. Jonathan Bernstein, (2015) states that he suggests using a 10 step process for crisis communication.

According to Timothy Coombs, (2015) crisis management is an ongoing process therefore, a three-stage model can be used as a framework to manage crisis. Phases consists of pre-crisis/planning, crisis event/ responding and post-crisis/ managing (Coombs, 2015). This three-stage approach can be used because future crisis can easily be adapted into this framework (Coombs, 2015). Timothy Coombs' approach focuses on the crisis management whereas the researcher of this study aims to find out whether a similar process can be used for developing a crisis communication strategy.

The 10 steps described by Jonathan Bernstein, (2015) consists of anticipating the crisis, identify your team, identify spokesperson, train the spokesperson, develop a monitoring system, know your stakeholders, developing a statement, asses crisis situation, finalise and adapt the message and lastly do a post-crisis analysis. This input from Jonathan Bernstein was very similar to Timothy Coombs, (2015) therefore the researcher went into an in-depth analysis of his work.

The pre-crisis phase includes identifying information sources, decisions regarding how information will be collected and evaluating the collected information of a potential crisis (Coombs, 2015). Coombs introduces a prevention process and states that communication regarding this process can be divided into issue management, risk assessment and reputation management. Issue management requires

communication with stakeholders keeping them updated regarding the crisis the organisation is facing (Coombs, 2015). In Quantum Energy a crisis such as COVID-19 has a huge impact not only to their employees but their customers safety. Therefore it will be important to communicate new updated rules and regulations to customers in the petroleum industry. The continuous communication will lead to stakeholder's anxiety levels to be reduced regarding a world pandemic. Risk reduction can be in the form of training of spokespeople as well as the whole public relations team in order to be up to date with the latest PR information and reputation management which happens through continuous communication (Coombs, 2015). According to Timothy Coombs, (2015) communication with stakeholders is essential when it comes to a crisis.

The crisis event phases suggests that the crisis management team must be aware of any and all problems that can arise because of the information collected (Coombs, 2015). The crisis event relies on the response from the organisation therefore the term "crisis response" encompasses crisis response strategies and external crisis communication (Coombs, 2015).

Post-crisis focuses on the managing part of the crisis and then evaluates the success of the crisis communication. After evaluation takes place a report can be completed with recommendation for future crisis as well as an executive summary of the crisis event (Coombs, 2015).

Taking the above into consideration the researcher agrees mostly with what Timothy Coombs said the biggest differences is the researcher wants to attempt implementing similar phases for developing crisis communication strategies rather than just responding and determining the crisis. The researcher will be asking the director and management what are the practical steps they would take in the planning phase of developing a crisis communication strategy. The practical steps used to execute the crisis communication strategies and the evaluation of the strategy will determine the success thereof.

The researcher agrees with the pre-crisis phases but refers to it at planning phase, Coombs pre-crisis phase steps and definition links with the aim the researcher has regarding the planning phase. The researcher argues that a executing phase will be

more effective when developing crisis communication strategies because it will provide a detailed plan on exactly how to go about developing and implementing the crisis communication strategies. The executing phase will include practical steps on how to deal with the anticipated crisis identified in the planning phase in terms of the crisis itself and the communication regarding the crisis.

The researcher argues that even though Coombs has a working framework for crisis response strategies it can be combined with the researcher's phases to develop a broader crisis communication strategy framework that can be adjusted according to the type of crisis the organisation faces. This however is not the aim of this research study, the researcher wants to determine the practical steps for such a framework for Quantum Energy. Taking this into account the researcher suggests combining the crisis event and responding phases together to be able to create a phase solely for managing purposes. Managing phase in terms of evaluating the crisis as a whole, its impact on the organisation and stakeholders and to determine whether the crisis communication strategy was successful. This will be measured and determined by establish if shared meaning was reached and if the crisis did not cause damage to the organisation's reputation.

2.3.2. Link between crisis communication strategies and situational crisis communication theory.

The researcher agrees with Kayla Christine Murphy, (2015) who says combining Situational Crisis Communication Theory, Stakeholder Theory and Kant's Categorical Imperative can help with crisis communication especially with regards to social media.

The easy and fast access to information through the rise of social media both researchers agrees public relations practitioners should develop a way to ensure effective crisis communication and ensure to use social media as primary communication channel because more stakeholders have access to social media (Murphy, 2015). It is important for this research study because the researcher wants to determine if Quantum Energy uses a practical step by step guide for crisis situations.

However the researcher is only using the Situational Crisis Communication Theory and believes that by identifying the crisis depending on the situation will help with

developing the crisis communications strategies as well as control the reputational damage (Amaresan, 2019). It is suggested that Stakeholder Theory and SCCT should be used together to develop an effective communication strategy (Murphy, 2015). It would allow the public relations team dealing with the crisis to identify and know their stakeholders for a given crisis situation, seeing as every crisis is different.

The researcher argues that by combining the three phases of planning, executing and monitoring with SCCT can give the same or even more effective strategy (Coombs, 2015). For example the research study looks at practical steps within the planning phases which encompasses identifying the crisis and stakeholders without using the Stakeholder Theory.

The literature under review states that by combining all three theories it can provide a counterbalance between the theories helping with ethical and effective communication (Murphy, 2015). The researcher suggests that the three phases will contain ethical considerations within (unbiases, transparency and trustworthy content). Therefore it would be unnecessary to combine more theories (Murphy, 2015).

The researcher disagrees with this literature as there is no indication of determining the success of the communication for example, not asking stakeholders how they interpreted the crisis communication sent out to them. This is to establish whether a shared meaning existed determining the effectiveness of communication (Murphy, 2015). Theories might provide valid theoretical ways of creating communication as well as provides guidelines which can contain possible suggestions for the practical steps. The researcher looks at practical steps used in practise for creating communication strategies. By determining Quantum Energy practical steps within each phase can indicate whether implementing the three phases could possibly enhance the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies (Murphy, 2015).

This literature only looks at social media crisis communication, the researcher disagrees for it is important to cater to all stakeholder needs including stakeholders who still use traditional media (Murphy, 2015). The researcher believes that taking all stakeholders into consideration could possibly establish and improve effectiveness of communication.

2.3.3. Effective crisis communication.

According to Andreas Bäckström Svensson and Njord Frölander, (2015) in a practical crisis situation a proactive crisis communication strategy must be in place, concise and have a general design. The researcher completely agrees with that statement and is precisely what the research study intends to establish by looking at Quantum Energy CC practical steps in developing strategies. The literature found that social media channels were seldomly used by some organisations during a crisis (Svensson & Frölander, 2015). The importance of using social media is vital as a means to communicate during a crisis, the researcher agrees but would aver that both social media and traditional media should be used (Svensson & Frölander, 2015). The reason being that people have more easy access to social media because of technological developments but traditional media should still be used to ensure that all stakeholders receive the communication and that journalists can publish correct information.

Crisis leadership according to Andreas Bäckström Svensson and Njord Frölander, (2015) is important to plan and execute crisis management and strategies. The researcher agrees that someone has to take the lead on developing crisis communication however the researcher suggests that leadership should be taken by the public relations team and a leader be appointed by them. By doing this it ensures the leader is well respected and they have the necessary knowledge surrounding crisis communication strategies. The literature attributes effective crisis communication to an effective crisis leader (Svensson & Frölander, 2015). The researcher agrees that this could be a factor, but it is not the only factor that determines the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies. Design and concise crisis communication strategies are regarded as important by the literature (Svensson & Frölander, 2015). The researcher wants to implement three phases that focuses not only on the design of the strategy but takes all factors into consideration. Factors such as, the stakeholders, the crisis, channel used, message being sent out, financial implication and reputation. Therefore, the researcher will be asking Quantum Energy what practical steps they use when determining crisis communication strategies.

According to Miko McFarland and Jason Hope, (2019) it is important to have a crisis communication strategy that serves all stakeholders. All crisis deserves attention but

often the prevention action and ratio of concern is unbalanced (McFarland & Hope, 2019). For example, anticipating the potential of a listeriosis outbreak but not being fully prepared or concerned (lack of concern was shown in the slow response time of Tiger Brands). Effective communication can lead to the management of stakeholders' fear therefore it is important to manage them proactively as well as reactively (McFarland & Hope, 2019). By putting a lot of effort into a specific strategy for each group of stakeholders will impact the effectiveness of the strategy (McFarland & Hope, 2019). Crisis response consists of preparation, managing the crisis, continuous evaluation and updates on progress (McFarland & Hope, 2019).

When developing a crisis response strategy in other word a crisis communication strategy the 5 c's are relatively effective. Calm, it is important for the communication strategy to prevent "emotional free fall" (McFarland & Hope, 2019). The researcher suggests calmness must be portrayed in the crisis communication strategy because it is useful when fear drives the behaviour of stakeholders (McFarland & Hope, 2019). For example, when COVID-19 started affecting South Africa the President calmly and confidently spoke to the nation at a press conference, this decreased South Africans fears surrounding the crisis. If the President were to seem stressed, worried and not prepared the nation would fear the worst and it could lead to a bigger crisis than the pandemic itself.

Collaboration, the researcher suggests that the public relations team working with the development of the strategies must come from different backgrounds to contribute different ideas when developing a strategy (McFarland & Hope, 2019). Backgrounds such as legal, corporate communication, marketing and journalism. Consistency refers to the crisis communication strategy being implemented consistently regardless of feedback and reaction from stakeholders (McFarland & Hope, 2019). If feedback is negative take it into account but keep the key message surrounding the crisis consistent.

Credibility ensure that the crisis communication strategy is formulated with substantial evidence to enhance the credibility of what is being communicated. Credibility can be damaged when the information given to stakeholders turns out to be incorrect. The volume and amount of communication must be adjusted according to the circumstances surrounding the crisis. Closing the loop this refers to managing and

evaluating of the crisis as well as the strategies which should be done throughout the entire process (McFarland & Hope, 2019). The research agrees with Miko McFarland and Jason Hope because the 5 c's can help the public relations team when they are looking at the three phases as suggested by the researcher. It will not only ensure thorough evaluation, but it will provide credibility and build confidence with the stakeholders.

2.3.4. Crisis response and timing.

According to An-Sofie Claeys and Verolien Cauberghe, (2012) it is necessary to use crisis response strategies and it should include objective information in order to restore an organisation's reputation. They say pre-planning strategies can sometimes lead to a difficult choice that must be made when choosing how to respond (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012). The researcher argues that planning and pre-planning can help anticipate certain crisis situations and assist in developing the final crisis communication strategy.

Crisis timing strategy most frequently is called stealing thunder this means the organisation sends out information regarding the crisis before the crisis appears in the media. The aim of this strategy is to reduce reputational damage. The authors suggest to use this strategy only when the crisis is preventable and in the event that it is not it can lead to law suits. The researcher agrees that the stealing thunder strategy can be effective but it depends on the crisis as well as the severity of it. The researcher disagrees with the authors that state not to release information if it can be harmful to the organisation (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012). This disagreement is solely because the researcher believes that all three phases must be ethical and that transparency is key when it comes to developing crisis communication strategies. The researcher does take the fact that some organisations do not disclose all information, take Steinhoff as example. If there was ethical codes and transparency throughout the organisation the crisis could have been averted or the law suit could have been less damaging.

3. Research Design and Methodology:

3.1. Research paradigm:

This will be a **qualitative** research study that uses the **interpretivism paradigm**. **Qualitative** research is used when the researcher wants to understand and explore people's behaviour and their actions. **Qualitative** research approach is best suited for this research seeing as the researcher is only focusing on Quantum Energy's crisis communication strategy steps and will not conclude with a generalised statement.

Qualitative research deals with the underlying qualities of experiences and meanings about a phenomenon in this case a crisis and the communication surrounding it. In this design in-depth information of a complex and multidimensional social context is gathered (du Plooy-Cilliers; Davis; Bezuidenhout, 2018). A crisis can be seen complex and multidimensional because it encompasses different dimensions such as; ecological, cultural, social and political (Takis, 2005). Within an South African context it is very important to acknowledge and consider such dimensions to ensure no discrimination takes place. The communication thereof is complex as the crisis communication strategies must consider all the dimensions and factors that can influence the strategies.

Interpretivism states that social science in research should describe and study social actions that are meaningful. This study can be seen as meaningful in the way that it will attempt to determine the practical steps that can take place when developing crisis communication strategies (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). Objects and human beings cannot be studied in the same way, as humans constantly change and the environment they function in influences them (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). Within this study the business environment constantly changes and faces different crisis which influences the way in which the public relations team formulates and develops the crisis communication strategies. The researcher wants to attempt to develop planning, executing and managing phases that can help an organisation with its crisis communication strategies. This study does not provide statistics or measure the success of implementing crisis communication strategies. The researcher wants to gather information and an in-depth understanding of how organisations such as

Quantum Energy anticipate, prepare, execute and manage crisis communication strategies.

This paradigm is used by the researcher as it does not only focus on explanation, control and prediction but also human experiences (Wiley, 2017). The ontology from a interpretivist's viewpoint is that they do not believe in objects, or that everyone experiences reality in the same way. They believe social constructions are formed based on how people experience the world and interact with other people. Human experiences refers to people within the organisation usually in the public relations department that have developed crisis communication strategies as well as have experience in handling different types of crisis. The researcher wants to identify what people within an organisation do when a problem (crisis) occurs, and how they deal with it. Epistemological viewpoint for interpretivists is that knowledge that is known to be common sense helps people by guiding them in their daily lives (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). It states that in order to understand people's behaviour, you need to know what they regard as common sense. This can be determined by establishing if employees first wait for orders or if they start the process because they have a general understanding of what to do.

This paradigm was chosen because the researcher believes that the way in which each individual interprets a crisis can have a perceived impact on the development of the crisis communication strategies. Interpretivism will allow the researcher to gain purposive sources of meaning (Nel, 2016). The researcher suggests by using the epistemological viewpoint the more knowledge will be gained regarding crisis communication strategies.

Interpretivism helps the researcher understand and interpret the uniqueness of this study and gain insider point of view which will determine what steps Quantum Energy takes when developing crisis communication strategies. For example the head of public relations will provide the steps the team follows when planning the communication for the crisis that occurs. Each member of the team will interpret the crisis differently thus give different suggestions to help formulate the strategy as well as give the researcher an in- depth understanding of what type of people are needed in a public relations team.

The researcher cannot make a generalised conclusion regarding crisis communication strategies but it can suggest that other researcher can attempt to research this topic in a quantitative approach if they would want a conclusion that can be generalised to more organisations.

3.2. Research design and approach:

This **qualitative** research study will make use of a **cross-sectional design** and will use semi-structured interview to collect data. This design and approach allows data to be collected at one point in time and creates an overall picture of a certain phenomenon (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). In other words the researcher collects data in one day from three of Quantum Energy employees (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). This allows the researcher to complete the research report to be completed in the one year time frame given by the IIE. The three semi-structured interviews will be with the Head Director of Quantum Energy, and two other employees of Quantum Energy CC.

This research study will **exploratory**. **Exploratory** research aims to identify key concepts, confirm assumption, identifies if the research problems has consequences, it allows researcher to obtain new insights etc. **Exploratory** research is usually used to explore unknown areas. New areas of research rise frequently for example the rise of social media and this alone opens many exploratory research to take place (du Plooy- Cilliers, et al., 2018). This research study is exploring the practical processes followed in the planning, executing and managing phases of developing crisis communication strategies within Quantum Energy. This is an unknown area because crisis communication strategies have evolved and changed over the years.

Exploratory usually works with an inductive reasoning that works with emerging theoretical framework rather than an established theory. In this case the research study uses deductive reasoning because a specific phenomenon is being analysed and the study will gain insight and understanding of Quantum Energy's crisis communication strategies (Creswell; Ebersöhn; Eloff; Ferreira; Ivankova; Jansen; Nieuwenhuis; Pietersen; Plano Clark, 2020).

This research study uses **deductive** line of reasoning allowing researchers to reason from a general assumption to one more specific (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). The researcher explores practical steps used in developing a crisis communication strategy. The researcher will use the broad Situational Crisis Communication Theory that has a general assumption and will attempt to narrow down the subject of crisis communication strategies to practical steps that can be used in the development of crisis communication strategies. The theory will be used to help start the research and the moves to attempts to determine the importance of practical steps and phases surrounding crisis communication strategies.

3.3. Population:

3.3.1. Population:

Population is the total group of all people from whom information is required for the study (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

3.3.2. Unit of analysis:

Unit of analysis are entities that frames the study's subject or the entity being analysed (Trochim, 2006). The unit of analysis in this research study is the founding member (known), and two other employees in managing positions within Quantum Energy CC Standerton.

3.3.3. Target and accessible population:

Target population is every one that is within the parameters of the population (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). Target population is also seen as the whole group that the researcher wants to use to generalise research findings (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). In this research study the target population is all diesel sales and logistic companies in South Africa.

Accessible population is the people from target population that are actually included and takes part in the researcher's study (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). Accessible population is the units of analysis within the target population, these are the people the researcher has access to which is the employees of the sales and logistic company Quantum Energy CC in Standerton.

3.3.4. Population parameters:

Population parameters of a study are all shared characteristics of a number of people of the research population (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). Parameters of the population can be the nature of the people, size, age, unique characteristics etc.

Parameters must be set to help identify the accessible population.

The parameters are that they must:

- work for Quantum Energy CC
- in a management position that
- assists in the development, management and execution of crisis communication strategies.
- Must have 5 years minimum work experience at Quantum Energy.

3.4. Sampling:

3.4.1. Probability or non-probability sampling:

In this research study non-probability sampling will be used. Non-probability sampling is when every unit does not have an equal chance because it is unknown which individuals of the population are going to take part in the sample (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

Non-probability sampling is usually used in qualitative research, when there is alignment in population parameters, no easy access to all individuals, and not used to generalise the findings (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). Non-probability is selected for this research study because only one of the three interviewees are known and the other two were unknown individuals that the researcher met on the day of the interviews. This method is used because the selection of the population used in the sample is chosen for their accessibility and can be used to demonstrate whether a trait exists in a population. The findings of this method cannot be used to generalise a larger population, and this study will only be for Quantum Energy CC however, the researcher will advise other researchers to further investigate this topic (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

3.4.2. Sampling method:

The non-probability sampling method to be used is quota sampling. In quota sampling the researcher purposefully chooses the sample. This method gathers representative data and information from a group of people. This chosen parameters of the researcher are represented in the sample group (Dudovskiy, 2018).

This method was chosen as there is a specific set of population parameters. Quota sampling cannot be manipulated in terms of gender, race, language, religion etc. as it only follows the parameter stipulated. It is cost-effective and time-efficient (Dudovskiy, 2018). The researcher sat down with the known interviewee and discussed potential managers that can be used for interviews however only two employees fitted all the population parameters. The three interviewed employees of Quantum Energy were easily accessible as the organisation is close to the researcher and they were the only people within the organisation that fitted into all the population parameters.

3.4.3. Sample size:

When the research population is too large, has many elements to reach and has constraints or limitations, then the researcher must identify a number of individuals that are manageable that can be researched (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). The sample size should not be too big because in qualitative research it is difficult to extract rich and thick data (Creswell, et al., 2020). For the purpose of this study the sample size is three employees within Quantum Energy CC. The study was done on this sample size because it was difficult to gain accessibility to all employees within Quantum Energy CC. The sample size took place in person with three individuals through separate semi- structured interviews.

Saturation point is when research process receives no new information in the data analysis this may indicate that collection is ceased (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017). Saturation point does not guarantee that no new information will be received but only indicates that the researcher has enough information to achieve the purpose of the research (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017). There are some studies that try to offer guidelines regarding sample size and data saturation which ranges from four people too 60

people. It is suggested that the researcher determines sample size that will provide the researcher with data saturation or theoretical saturation in this case three employees that are fully involved in all managing aspects within Quantum Energy (Creswell, et al., 2020).

3.5. Data collection:

3.5.1. Data collection method:

Semi-structured interviews utilised for data collection allows the researcher to develop open-ended questions in advance, easy and time-efficient leaving room to adjust questions. This is important as it allowed the researcher to add and adjust questions, complete this study and receive answers within a short period of time (August 2020) (Ebersöhn; Eloff; Ferreira; Ivankova; Jansen; Nieuwenhuis; Pietersen; Plano Clark, 2020).

This data collection method was chosen because it allows the researcher to prepare questions before the interview ensuring that there was a guide for the conversation that can be adjusted, and it helped everyone to stay topic. The open-ended questions will provide the researcher with more in depth information regarding practical steps in developing crisis communication strategies. It allowed for two-way communication which allowed the researcher to interpret both verbal and non-verbal communication providing more information than what a normal questionnaire would have. This method was chosen because of its advantages of being able to analyse verbal and non-verbal cues, it also allowed the interviewees to use their own words to answer the questions and allowed the researcher to add questions in the interview which assisted in gathering enough information to receive answers for the three research questions (Debois, 2019).

3.5.2. Data collection application:

1. The researcher phone Quantum Energy known member (Participant 1) and asked if they were willing to partake in a research study regarding crisis communication strategies.

2. Telephonic permission was given which allowed the researcher to conduct three interviews on the 20th of August 2020.
3. Written permission for conducting, recording and using the interviews was received and a suitable place, date and time was arranged for the interviews.
4. The researcher prepared a few open-ended questions as well as a brief summary of the research topic to which gave the interviewees some context and it kept the interview on topic.
5. On the day of the interviews the researcher printed out three sets of the open-ended questionnaire, one copy of the research study thus far including the conceptualization table for when the interviewee needed clarity on a certain concept, a smartphone for the recording of the interviews as well as pens and an extra note pad.
6. Each interview was conducted separately and started with a brief summary of the research study to provide context, then the researcher indicated that the recording and interview will start.
7. The researcher then started asking the interviewees questions starting with easy straight forward questions and then moved towards more complex questions.
8. The researcher added three questions while conducting the first interview, these questions were included into the other interviews where there were no more questions added.
9. The researcher thanked the interviewees for partaking in the research study and taking the time to speak to the researcher.
10. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes to an hour.

11. Once all interviews were completed the researcher left the premises with the recorded data, and answers and extra notes that was written down during the interviews.

3.6. Data analysis:

3.6.1. Data analysis method:

Thematic analysis will be used. This explores and identifies patterns or themes within the text (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013). Thematic analysis views different ranges of meaning within a theme and not statistical significance (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). The researcher will draw specific raw data from the analysis and develops themes without a preconceived conceptual framework being used (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). By constantly comparing data and careful examination, categories and themes emerge using deductive reasoning (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

The researcher identified themes relating to crisis communication strategies. In this analysis any data that was consistent and duplicated answers from each participant determined the themes for the coding process.

Analysing qualitative research aims to understand the bigger picture through using data to describe and find the meaning of a certain phenomenon (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). Such as asking questions to assist in answering research questions and reach the research objectives surrounding practical steps in developing crisis communication strategies. Coding and labelling different data into an order of differences and similarities is used in qualitative as well as quantitative analysis (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). Coding makes the process of analysis more manageable and the aim of thematic analysis is to highlight important information from the data collected (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

The researcher did not have an existing system of pre-coding therefore, eight steps of thematic analysis was used in order to code, label and identify data for the research study (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

1. Prepare the data:

The researcher transcribed the raw data collected during the interviews (interview notes and recordings) into written digital text by using an organised and systematic process. This allowed the transcription to be comprehensive and organised which made it easier for the researcher to analyse the data. This process allowed the researcher to have more knowledge on the research topic (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

2. Define the coding unit to be analysed:

This is where the intended analysis will be put into basic coding unit (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). The researcher decided on the coding units to be in numbers, one word and short sentences this allowed for more manageable content. The ideas and concepts the researcher examined was expressed in different ways because different people took part in the research study. This allowed for the data to be broken down into smaller and more manageable parts (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

3. Develop categories and coding scheme or conceptual framework:

Forming codes categories from grouping similar and related coding units together. To assist the researcher in data coding a conceptual framework should be created. Naming and labelling codes' categories, the researcher used common properties of text analysed to create labels and names (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). This was done to simplify and identify themes and codes in the data being analysed (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

This research study, grouped the same type of answers into certain categories, then after all the categories were identified the research labelled it for an easier analysing process and identify similar themes within the study. For example; code 01 was given to the theme- Management.

4. Test coding scheme on a sample text:

A sample of the data was taken and the categories' definition was tested on its clarity and consistency (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). All problems with coding should be solved (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). The researcher solved coding issues by using different colours for different themes in order to limit mistakes that could be made. The clarity and consistency was tested by looking at whether the categories aligned with the research title, topic, problem and question.

5. Code text:

A thorough examination of data and consideration of all the meaningful and relevant categories and items is called coding data (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). When the data was analysed the researcher coloured relevant answers with certain words and codes (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). This research study will use thematic coding, which is a process of reducing data by identifying themes (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). The researcher identified themes by looking at the same type of answers collected throughout the interviews. Such as coded managing members, middle management and manager under theme management and code 01 in blue.

6. Assess coding consistency:

Consistency of the conducted coding was double checked (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). The researcher looked at the coding and determined that all the codes are relevant and are all either one-word or short sentences ensuring that all coding is done in the same way throughout all the data being analysed. Theme such as: crisis communication.

7. Interpret data:

Categories identified was interpreted to draw conclusions using own opinion, theory and previous studies to be able to analyse and give meaning to the data collected (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). Three steps to interpret data; explain relationships found in data (for example, the relationship between practical steps and formulating crisis communication strategies), consider irrelevant data information (if they mention any other activities that are not relevant to crisis communication strategies) and factors

that can influence results must be taken into consideration (interviewee might be sick influencing how they answer questions) (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

The researcher went through all the coded data as well as previous studies to form a conclusion and opinion on the research done and answers received to find an answer to the research question and the research problem.

8. Report methods and findings:

In a manner that is truthful, accurate and complete, report on the process of analysing and interpreting the data (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). The research study's data is already in digital format all that the researcher has to do is form an accurate complete and truthful conclusion regarding the study. This will determine if the research question has been answered and if the research problem is solved.

3.6.2. Data analysis application:

For the purpose of this research study P1= Participant 1, P2= Participant 2 and P3= Participant 3. Question 1 is presented here, the rest of the questions can be found under Annexure D.

Question 1: What is your title and job description within the organisation?

P1: I am the founding and managing member of Quantum Energy cc. I am a hands on CEO and I am involved with all aspects and activities of the organisation.

P2: I am a minister without Portfolio. I am part of middle management dealing with HR, disciplinary processes, employee matters, general legal responsibilities.

P3: I am the business accountant, office manager and involved in most organisation aspects and activities.

Question 1	
Themes	Code
Management - Managing member - Middle management - manager	01
Involvement in the organisation - All aspects and activities - Most aspects and activities	02
Specific department - Human resources - Legal responsibilities	03

	Question 1
P1	01 & 02
P2	01 & 03
P3	01 & 02
Most common response	01 & 02
Least common response	03

When the participants were asked what are their title and job description within Quantum Energy cc it was evident that all three participants fall within the population parameters. All three participants are in management positions and 2 out of 3 participants (66.6%) are involved in all activities within the organisation and the third participant deals more with the human resources and legal queries within the organisation.

4. Findings and Interpretation of Findings:

4.1. Findings and interpretation:

The findings of the questions asked in the interview is divided into five themes.

4.1.1. The organisation and interviewees:

Question 1: What is your title and job description within the organisation?
Question 2: What is the organisation's composition?

In question 1 the participants stated they are in managing positions and involved with most organisational activities. Participant 1 is the founder and managing member of Quantum Energy CC for 19 years. Participant 2 has been managing human resources and legal aspects of the organisation for 10 years. Participant 3 has been the organisations' business accountant and office manager for 7 years.

The second question 100% of the participants mentioned that the organisation is small with a high turnover. 66.6% described the organisation as dynamic, growing and needs to adapt to changes in technology, society and economy. The organisation is starting to implement formalised and structured communication strategies. 2 of 3 participants indicated that this family organisation did not always require formal communication strategies. This organisation based in a rural area limits human resources and employs both educated and uneducated people.

By interpreting the answers a gap in formal communication strategies was identified. The organisation is growing and needs formal, structured, written communication strategies. All organisations are susceptible to a crisis therefore it is important to have crisis communication strategies or strategy formulating steps in place (Christensen, 2018). These questions do not specifically link to previous literature or objectives but gave insight into the type of organisation being researched to establish its crisis communication strategies development.

4.1.2. Crisis communication strategies:

Question 3: How would you describe your company's current crisis communication strategies'?

Question 4: Did the organisation have a crisis communication process in place for COVID-19?

Question 5: When looking at developing your strategies what phases do you make use of?

Question 6: How would you define the term planning phase?

Question 7: What do you think the executing phase consists of?

Question 8: How would you define the term managing phase?

Questions 3 to 5 attempted to determine whether Quantum Energy has formal crisis communication strategies in place and when developing strategies do they use certain phases. Questions 6 to 8 established what the participants understood the phases to be. These questions attempted to determine whether the research links with previous literature and research questions.

All participants agreed the current crisis communication strategies though informal employees have a general understanding of what to do in certain crisis situations. 66.6% of the participants said despite the general understanding of Quantum Energy's crisis communication strategies they are unwritten and undocumented with no specific structure or phases to develop crisis communication strategies. COVID-19 is a real imminent crisis for organisations resulting in question 4. This allowed the researcher to identify practical steps taken to develop crisis communication strategies within the organisation. The common response was most people were not prepared for a crisis of this scale. Participant 3 stated the World Health Organisation assisted with practical steps on how to handle COVID-19 in the workplace. 66.6% of the participants said the administrative staff was affected by the virus which in turn affected the daily running of the organisation. The perceived impact of the virus and lockdown went beyond what any organisation was prepared for. Participants emphasised the importance of communication with clients and employees as the petroleum industry is an essential service and did not close during lockdown. The death of 2 employees impacted morale and they had to manage the impact this had on clients and employees.

When participants were asked what phases do they make use of when developing strategies 3 out of 3 participants agreed that there must be some type of preparation

for potential crisis situations (pre-planning). The plan developed in pre-planning must be further developed into action plan. The plan must be implemented and executed through communication and then evaluated to determine the success thereof. 66.6% said that different crisis situations have different handling protocols and employees involved knows what to do. Participants had the same basic understanding of planning phase however defined it differently. 100% of the participants associated the term executing phase with the word “implementing”. 66.6 % of the participants defined the term managing phase as measuring success of implemented strategy. Quantum Energy evaluates its crisis communication strategies by looking at whether clients were lost or gained.

Previous literature suggests a three-stage model can be used to manage crisis (Coombs, 2015). The participants mentioned pre-planning phase which links to Coombs’ pre-crisis phase however the researcher refers to it as the planning phase. The COVID-19 crisis had a perceived impact on Quantum Energy’s employees and customers safety. Crisis communication strategies allows the organisation to manage the issue by communicating with stakeholders keeping them updated (Coombs, 2015). By establishing the organisations current crisis communication strategies through asking the above mentioned questions the findings suggested that previous literature that emphasises the importance of communication with stakeholder during a crisis is true (Coombs, 2015) (Bernstein, 2015).

4.1.3. Practical steps used within different phases of developing crisis communication strategies:

Question 9: What practical steps do you take in the planning phase of developing a crisis communication strategy?

Question 10: What practical steps would you say Quantum Energy uses in their executing phase?

Question 11: What practical steps would you use in the managing phase?

Questions 9 to 11 was asked to determine answers for the research questions and problem. The strategy development phases suggested by previous literature of Timothy Coombs (2015) was adapted by the researcher for this specific study. The participants stated practical steps in the planning phase of developing a crisis

communication strategy is to establish what information has to be sent out. Involve necessary stakeholders such as representatives and fleet manager. Meetings with involved employees must be held and crisis needs to be validated. Determine which stakeholders need to receive what information by doing a stakeholder analysis.

Practical steps used in the executing phase is to determine which communication channels must be used such as emails, WhatsApp or letters. Prepare a communication message draft and approve the communication before sending it out. 66.6% of participants view internal communication as a crucial practical step in the executing phase. 2 of 3 participants agrees that follow ups on communication is vitally important. This is in line with Andreas Bäckström Svensson and Njord Frölander, (2015) who states communication is an important part of conducting business.

Practical steps used in the managing phase consists of looking at the clients to determine whether the crisis communication strategy was successful. Consistent monitoring of the crisis, ensures regular communication updates, eliminates contradicting information and evaluates performance levels of employees and determine the success of the strategy.

Timothy Coombs' focused on how the crisis management is used and was adapted by the researcher (planning, executing and managing) to potentially develop crisis communication strategy. Participants stated the practical step of "following up" on communication can be done in the executing phase however the researcher suggested that it must rather be part of the managing phase for it can assist in determining if the strategy was successful.

The researcher agrees with the pre-crisis phases but refers to it at planning phase (Coombs, 2015). The researcher argues that a executing phase will be more effective when developing crisis communication strategies because it will provide a detailed practical steps on exactly how to develop and implement crisis communication strategies. The participants' answers indicates that Coombs' framework can be combined with the researcher's phases to develop a broader crisis communication strategy framework that can be adjusted according to the type of crisis the organisation faces. Managing phase can refer to evaluating the crisis as a whole, to determine

whether the crisis communication strategy was successful (Coombs, 2015). The researcher found that the term managing phase confused the participants and therefore suggests that the term must be changed to evaluation phase to avoid misunderstandings.

4.1.4. Linking practice and theory:

Question 12: Do you think having a step-by-step practical guide (that can be adjusted depending on the crisis) of how to handle crisis communication could be helpful ? Elaborate on your statement.

This question was asked to determine whether there is a correlation between the practical steps Quantum Energy uses and the previous literature that can help develop a guide for crisis communication strategies. Participants agreed a guide would be helpful. Answers were positive and identified ways in which a guide could be of assistance. 100% of the participants suggested it will allow employees to know how to handle the crisis situation and what is expected of them. One participant mentioned it could possibly contribute to effective dealing of a crisis and the communication thereof. It could help prevent financial loss or loss of life, or damage to reputation and it avoids impulsive behaviour that could aggravate the crisis situation. Situational Crisis Communication Theory assists with developing crisis communication strategies as it constructs communication based on the current crisis (Amaresan, 2019). By combining the theory with the phases it can ensure that communication is ethical and effective (Murphy, 2015). Theory only provides guidelines but by combining it with the identified practical steps it can formulate a working in practise crisis communication strategy development guide.

4.1.5. Effective and successful crisis communication strategies:

Question 13: When looking at previous crisis communication strategies, how does being prepared for a crisis help?

Question 14: How vital is crisis communication strategies' success for the organisation?

These questions attempted to determine the effectiveness and success of implemented crisis communication strategies. Being prepared for a crisis is not always possible but it would allow for less mistakes and reputational damage. When a crisis reoccurs the organisation will be prepared. The last question asked the participants whether crisis communication strategies is vital for organisation's success participants agreed that strategies are essential and vital. It allows everyone involved to receive accurate first-hand information in a crisis. The participants answer of "preparation is key" crisis communication strategies could assist in effective and efficient actions leading to organisational success. A proactive crisis communication strategy must be in place for a crisis situation (Svensson & Frölander, 2015). Literature suggests the design and concise crisis communication strategies are important for effective communication to take place which the participants and the researcher agrees with. Effective communication can lead to the management of stakeholders' fears thus avoiding misunderstanding or lack of communication (McFarland & Hope, 2019).

4.2. Findings for research problem:

The research problem is that it is unclear which practical steps are followed in developing a successful crisis communication strategy. The researcher found that the best solution to this problem is that the organisation constructs a written, widely available guide on crisis communication strategies as concluded from questions 9 to 11. Based on the findings the guide should contain three phases identified by the researcher adapted from Timothy Coombs (2015) along with possible real-life crisis scenarios and examples of practical steps that could be used such as meetings, phone calls, diverting trucks and informing involved stakeholders.

4.3. Findings for research questions and objectives:

4.3.1. Research questions:

1. What processes are followed when developing a crisis communication strategy within Quantum Energy?

Quantum Energy does not have formal written down communication, but they do make use of practical steps that can be classified into planning, executing and managing phases. These steps were established from previous crisis situations. The organisation is growing and therefore starting to document and develop crisis communication strategies.

2. What steps take place in the planning and executing phases?

From the practical steps the participants gave, a broader term can be given for each step (planning and executing). The planning phases determines potential crisis situations, develops a plan to solve the problem and determines what communication will be sent out to the stakeholders. The executing phase consists of physically implementing the solution to the problem and formulating correct communication for stakeholders to receive.

3. What steps are used to manage crisis communication strategies?

The common answer provided by the participants suggests implementing evaluation systems to determine whether the communication was received in the correct manner and if the strategy was efficient. This can be done by taking the current client list and establish whether clients were lost or gained and follow up calls can be made to determine if clients received the necessary communication.

4.3.2. Research objectives:

The following research objectives closely links with some of the research questions and therefore some findings can be seen as repetitive.

1. To determine what takes place in the planning phase of crisis communication strategies.

It was established that pre-planning and developing an action plans happens in this phase. The organisation determines possible crisis situations that is a possible threat to the petroleum industry such as diesel shortages or truck accidents. Action plan that is developed in this phase consist not only on how to solve the crisis, but it focuses on how to communicate with stakeholders in a crisis situation. It determines what channel to use, what information needs to be sent and to which stakeholders. The answers the researcher received agrees with previous literature such as Coombs and Bernstein that planning and pre-planning can help anticipate crisis situations and assist in developing crisis communication strategy.

2. To establish whether Quantum Energy CC has an executing phase for their crisis communication strategies.

Quantum Energy does have an executing phase in which they implement the action plan develop for the crisis communication strategy. The organisation does not label the different steps they take. The participants state that the organisation is growing, and it has become increasingly important to document all communication and develop a basic way to ensure successful crisis communication strategies. 100% of the participants agree that the most vital step in the executing phase is to use the correct communication channel to ensure effective crisis communication takes place. The researcher emphasises that the theory of SCCT is very relevant for different crisis situations require different execution.

3. To determine how Quantum Energy CC plans on managing crisis communication strategies that have been implemented.

The participants agreed that it is important to establish whether the crisis communication strategy that was implemented was received successfully. The researcher found that the participants did not fully understand what was meant by the term managing and therefore, the researcher suggests changing managing phase to

evaluation phase. Quantum Energy evaluates the success of the implemented strategy by looking at client lists. The researcher recommends that follow up calls that participants mentioned as a practical step in the executing phase should rather be used as an evaluation measurement. Thus, indicating an agreement between the newfound findings and previous literature surrounding effective crisis communication (Svensson & Frölander, 2015)

4. To establish whether, continuous managing and monitoring of crisis communication strategies should take place.

As shown in previous literature managing and monitoring of all communication especially in crisis situations influences its effectiveness (Coombs, 2015). The findings agrees that to ensure the crisis communication strategies is successful it is important to continuously manage and monitor the strategy as well as the crisis to ensure all stakeholders are kept up to date, shared meaning is reached and reputational damage is avoided (Coombs, 2015). Crisis communication strategies needs to be evaluated to see whether it is working or needs improvements (Institute for Public Relations, 2007). An organisation must continuously seek to improve crisis communication strategies either by preventing the crisis, preparing for the crisis or structure good crisis communication response (Institute for Public Relations, 2007).

4.4. Trustworthiness:

Trustworthiness is defined as the soundness of a report with credible evidence supporting the research topic and is used in qualitative research for results are not determined by numbers (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). Different criteria determines the credibility and trustworthiness of research findings (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

The four elements of trustworthiness:

1. Credibility, refers to whether the data provided by participants was interpreted accurately by the researcher (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). Interaction with participants allows accurate interpretation of data as the researcher gains better insight into the lives of the participants therefore increasing credibility (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). The interviews allowed the researcher to do this and the recordings made as proof of everything said in the interview. If the findings are believable it increases the credibility of the study.
2. Transferability determines whether the findings can be implemented to a similar study and provide a similar outcome (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). The researcher suggests that further research can be done to determine whether a practical step by step adjustable guide for developing crisis communication strategies.
3. Dependability is the quality of the process of interpreting the different data collection methods, data analysis and the theory generated from the data (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). The researcher spent a lot of time transcribing and coding data in order to formulate truthful and trustworthy findings.
4. Confirmability refers to whether or not data collected supports the interpretations and findings of the researcher's study (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018). To assist other researchers in scrutinising the research design it requires the researcher to describe the research study in detail, enabling other researcher to come to similar findings (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

This research study took these elements into consideration. Using credible participants (managers of Quantum Energy) answering from first-hand experiences and data was collected and interpreted thoroughly. More data collection methods could be used but this study only focused on semi- structured interviews. The answers received were comprehensive allowing other researchers to do similar research and find similar findings (transferability). The comprehensiveness of this research study allows for confirmability.

5. Conclusion:

5.1. Summary of findings:

The research findings concluded that Quantum Energy CC does use practical steps when developing crisis communication strategies, however the researcher suggest the organisation implements planning, executing and managing phases to ensure for a formal and well planned way of communicating in crisis situations. The research problem, questions and objectives were answered and explained in the findings section. The researcher suggests that further research should be done for it has the potential of influencing the way organisations develop crisis communication strategies.

5.2. Anticipated contributions:

The researcher hopes to provide a deeper understanding into crisis communication strategies specifically the practical steps behind planning, executing and managing of the crisis communication strategy. Existing literature does not focus on the practical steps used to develop and implement crisis communication strategies. Therefore, the researcher feels that a different side of crisis communication strategies is being researched which could contribute to the field of communications.

The researcher believes that by determining the practical steps used in the planning, executing and managing phases of developing crisis communication strategies within Quantum Energy the same practical steps could potentially be used broadly in other organisations if altered and customised. The researcher suggests that other researchers should attempt to research this topic further to determine universal steps. This research will assist Quantum Energy in planning, executing and managing its crisis communication strategies. The research anticipates that the findings will provide Quantum Energy with practical steps to help formulate crisis communication strategies.

This research could possibly help determine the importance of developing crisis communication strategies for organisations like Quantum Energy before the crisis occurs, while the crisis is happening and after the crisis happened.

5.3. Ethical considerations:

Ethics are seen as a person's professional code of conduct and moral values setting the standard for behaviour thus ethics are crucial in research (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

High ethical standards are ensured by the researcher by implementing the following ethical codes:

- 1- Participation is voluntary.
- 2- The interview questions did not contain discriminatory, offensive or foul language.
- 3- Prior written consent was obtained for using the information provided.
- 4- The researcher ensured the interviewees' privacy by protecting their identity through referring to participant A,B and C.
- 5- Interviewee were treated equally and with respect.
- 6- The researcher ensured that the interviewees were comfortable and not under duress by conducting interviews in a private known environment (Quantum Energy office).
- 7- Biased answers was avoided by ensuring questions asked were easy to understand and the researcher only provided explanations of questions and not examples or answers.
- 8- Interviews were conducted separately.
- 9- The use of other authors' works within this research study was referenced by using Harvard referencing style. Giving credit to the authors where credit is due.
- 10- The research will maintained a high level of objectivity throughout study to ensure the findings are as truthful as possible.
- 11- The researcher followed the correct channels and promised (in writing) not to impact Quantum Energy's reputation.

5.4. Limitations of the study:

Limitations are constraints or restrictions within the research study that is out of the researcher's control and can hinder findings (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

Delimitations occur because of the researcher's choices and determined population parameters (du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2018).

Limitations:

- 1- Financial constraints: this research study had limited funds. Scarce financial resources compromise research possibilities, such limitations can reflect in the findings of the research study (Moura, 2017).
- 2- Time constraints: this research study had to take place in one year limiting the accessible population.
- 3- Communication constraints: misunderstanding between the researcher and the participants and misinterpretation of data can influence findings.
- 4- Language: the interviewees' home language might not be English making it difficult for them to fully comprehend the questions being asked.
- 5- Pre-planned questions could be biased.
- 6- A generalised statement cannot be made.
- 7- Sample constraints: sample size is only 3 people, it is assumed that a saturation point will be reached, to fully understand a specific topic a broader population must participate.
- 8- Access to information: there is a lack of previous literature on this specific topic.
- 9- Previous data age: when using secondary data in this case looking at previous research older than 5 years might not be applicable.

Delimitations:

- 1- The parameters or characteristics for the sample size (three people).
- 2- The prepared questions relates to the research topic only thus narrowing the scope of the study.
- 3- Questions are controlled by the researcher, different questions could result in different findings.

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7. Annexures:

7.1. Annexure A: Consent form

Consent form

My name is Daniellé Mynhardt. I am currently a Honours student studying communication at Varsity College Sandton. I am currently working on a study which is aimed at gaining deeper understanding into the practical steps taken by Quantum Energy CC when dealing with crisis communication strategies. By participating in this study, should you consent to doing so, you will be required to provide answers to the questions asked in the interview, all of your personal details will be kept confidential and will not be given out under any circumstance. Please note that your answers will be used in the study under an alias, for example Participant A.

Before starting the interview, please provide your consent to my usage of your answers in my study by signing below:

I, _____, give my consent for the answers I provide below to be used in the study of done by Daniellé Mynhardt.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

7.2. Annexure B: Interview questions

**Semi- Structured Interview possible questions with added interview
questions.**

1. What is your title and job description within the organisation?
2. What is the organisation composed of?
3. How would you describe your company's current crisis communication strategies?
4. When looking at developing your strategies what phases do you make use of?
5. Did the organisation have a strategy in place for COVID -19
6. How would you define the term planning phase?
7. What do you think the executing phase consists of?
8. How would you define the term managing phase?
9. What practical steps do you take in the planning phase of developing a crisis communication strategy?
10. What practical steps would you say Quantum Energy uses in the executing phase?
11. What practical steps would you use in the managing phase?
12. Do you think having a step-by-step practical guide (that can be adjusted depending on the crisis) of how to handle crisis communication could be helpful? Elaborate on your statement.
13. When looking at previous crisis communication strategies, how does being prepared for a crisis help?
14. How vital are crisis communication strategies success for the organisation?

7.3. Annexure C: Ethical clearance



24 JULY 2020

Student name: Danielle Mynhardt
Student number: 17229791
Campus: IIE's Varsity College

Re: Approval of Bachelor of Arts in Communication Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

There are some aspects that you still need to address in your proposal. You will need to address these aspects in consultation with your supervisor before you may proceed (see below):

Please discuss with your supervisor/navigator/lecturer how you will address these issues listed below:

Please note: **Your fieldwork may only proceed once you address the following issues:**

- Please make all the changes suggested/recommended by your supervisor.
- Title is too long. Shorten it.
- Proposed title: *An exploratory study of the processes followed when developing a crisis communication strategy at a Johannesburg based company.*
- You can then focus on the planning, execution and management of these processes in your problem, literature and objectives.
- Research question: *What processes are followed when developing a crisis communication strategy?*

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor:



ALECIA FOURIE

Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC):



JENNA-LEE RAMNARAIN

7.4. Annexure D: Data analysis application continue

Question 2: What is the organisation's composition?

P1: Sma family organisation that is very dynamic and future oriented with a corporate organisation turnover.

P2: The company was founded in 2001 by the current owner with 1 truck that was driven by himself transporting and selling diesel. The company has now grown with a turnover in excess of 2 Billion Rand per annum.

A family owned enterprise and operating in an informal and mostly rural area, employing largely uneducated labour, drivers, mechanics, and operators, it did not necessitate large numbers of educated, highly skilled employees.

Although the company is still primarily structured around a small management group and small administrative component, in a society that is technologically advanced, increasing numbers of employees and expanding operations it has however become clear that it necessitates a skilled and knowledgeable management team to sustain the business and encourage growth.

Circumstances and a changing society has led to steps taken in regards to forming communication processes and implementing a more structured approach to the management.

P3: Quantum Energy is a small company with a high turnover per annum, that has both educated and uneducated employees. The company is situated in a small town and tries to help the town and its people where possible.

Question 2	
Themes	Code
Size:	04
• Small	
• Grown	
• Small management group	

• Small administrative component	
Familiarity with enterprise	05
Characteristics: • Dynamic and future oriented • Increasing number of employees • Expanding operations	06
Turnover: • Corporate turnover • excess of 2 Billion Rand per annum. • High turnover	07
Employees: • The company did not necessitate large numbers of educated, highly skilled employees. • both educated and uneducated employees	08
Socially responsible	09
Formalising communication processes	10

	Question 2
P1	04,05,06,07,
P2	04,05,06,07,08,09 & 10
P3	04,07 & 08
Most common response	04 & 07
Least common response	09 & 10

When the participants were asked what the organisation composition is the most common response was small company and high turnover. 2 out of 3 participants mentioned that the dynamic organisation started small but is now growing and needs to adapt with the changes in technology, society and economy. Participant 2 mentioned that the organisation is starting to implement formalised communication strategies and more structure to the management. 2 out of 3 participants mentioned family organisation indicating the organisation is run by a family which does not always require formal communication when making decisions thus indicating that there is a gap in formal communication strategies. (66.6%) indicated that the organisation employees both educated and uneducated people, because there are limited human resources in a small rural town. Lastly, participant 3 indicated that the organisation is socially responsible. It can be said that even though the organisation is small it is starting to become a corporate organisation that needs formal, structured, written down communication strategies among other things.

Question 3: How would you describe your company's current crisis communication strategies'?

P1: Informal, unstructured, not written down but there is a general understanding of what needs to happen in certain crisis situations.

P2: Strategies are in place although largely undocumented, informal, and unstructured. Because of the way the company is comprised it is easy to involve top management. The immediate availability of management to deal with problems is also an advantage. Instructions are then given.

P3: There is no formal written down strategy but employees have the roles which varies between phoning supplier to confirm information to sending out information to clients regarding crises.

Quest on 3	
Themes	Code
Informa	11
Unstructured	12
Written: Not written down Undocumented	13
General understanding - Immediate availability of management to deal with problems - Employees all have their duties	14

	Quest on 3
P1	11,12,13 & 14
P2	11,12,13 & 14
P3	11 & 14
Most common response	11 & 14
Least common response	NONE

When the participants were asked to describe the company's current crisis communication strategies, all three participants agreed that the current crisis communication strategies are informal but there is a general understanding between the employees on what to do in certain crisis situations. 2 out of 3 participants mentioned that even though there is a general understanding on what to do in certain crisis situations Quantum Energy's crisis communication strategies are not written down or documented as yet and follows no specific structure (steps). Every time 2 out of the 3 participants (66.6%) has common answers to the question asked.

Question 4: Did the organisation have a crisis communication process in place for COVID-19?

P1: Not at a , but when COVID-19 affected our employees we did take a steps to prevent the spread of the virus such as:

Closed premises, contacted people to disinfect the office, notified people who came into contact with that employee etc.

P2: I don't think anyone was entirely prepared for COVID-19 and even after lockdown did not realise the impact this would have on the business.

- Firstly impacted the availability of fuel after closure of refineries. After that crisis was managed by sending communications to clients as we found that by communicating our changes the clients could manage the expectations and were also in a better situation to adjust their operations accordingly.
- Secondly when the business itself affected almost the entire administrative component and 6 employees were off sick at the same we had difficulty in sending out statements and invoices and complying with usual administrative requirements.
- The death of 2 employees impacted morale and we had to manage the impact this had on clients and their fears when visiting the premises. We had to send out notices that premises had been sanitised and safe to enter.
- Measures that we put in place like "no Mask – no Service" were reduced and negatively commented on in social media.

P3: No one was really prepared for COVID to hit a close knit community, luckily the department of health and world health organisation did have a plan companies could follow in the instances of a COVID case within the company.

We contacted people who may have come into contact with the employee, closed the premises, arranged for it to be sanitised, made more persona

protective equipment was bought and given to all employees as well as more signs and sanitation stations on the premises was implemented.

Quest on 4	
Themes	Code
Preparation: - Not at all - I don't think anyone was prepared - No, but there were guidelines from the department of health and the world health organization	15
Employees: - affected our employees - entrepreneurial staff	16
Practical steps: - Steps - Closed premises - Contacted people - Sanitized - Measures such as "no mask no service" - More personal protective equipment - Sanitation stations	17
Impact on business: availability of fuel after closure of refineries	18
Communication: our changes the contents send out notices	19
Death	20

	Quest on 4
P1	15, 16 & 17
P2	15,16,17,18,19 & 20
P3	15 & 17
Most common response	15 & 17
Least common response	18,19 & 20

When the participants were asked whether the organisation had a crisis communication process in place for COVID-19 the common response from participants was no because most people and organisations were not prepared for a crisis of this scale. They agreed that the World Health Organisation's rules helped a lot when it came to the practical steps that had to be taken when a few employees tested positive for the virus. 2 out of the 3 participants (66.6%) mentioned that there were a few employees affected by the virus which affected the business because there was only one admin staff member in the office at that time.

Participant 2 has a legal background and therefore that answer went into more detail than participants 1 and 3 as leading to uncommon answers. Participant 2 mentioned that the impact of the virus and lockdown went beyond what any organisation was prepared for. It impacted the availability of fuel after the closure of refineries during lockdown. Measurements such as "no Mask = no Service" were put into place by Quantum Energy which led to unnecessary negative social media posts. The participant also emphasised the importance of communication with clients and employees were extremely important as the petroleum industry was seen as essential and did not close during lockdown. The death of 2 employees impacted morale and Quantum Energy had to manage the impact this had on clients and their fears when visiting the premises therefore continuous communication to place as well as notices where put up to inform clients that the premises has been sanitised and safe.

Question 5: When looking at developing your strategies what phases do you make use of?

P1: Every situation is unique and has different handling protocols but given the industry wherein we function pre planning can take place then once crisis happens plan will be further developed, implemented and evaluated.

P2: Identifying possible crisis situations, plan for the crisis, executing the plan and evaluating the implemented plan

P3: No specific phases but we do look at possible crisis situations and from there develop an action plan that is communicated internally to ensure employees know what to do in a given crisis situation and to evaluate the success of it.

Quest on 5	
Themes	Code
Situation is unique	21
Crisis: - Different handling protocols - Employees know what to do	22
Phase 1: - Pre planning - Identifying possible crisis situations - Look at possible crisis situations	23
Phase 2: - Plan will be further developed - plan for the crisis - develop an action plan	24
Phase 3: - Implemented - Executing	25

• Communicated internally	
Evaluated	26

	Question 5
P1	21,22,23,24,25 & 26
P2	23,24,25 & 26
P3	22,23,24,25 & 26
Most common response	22,23,24,25 & 26
Least common response	21

When the participants were asked what phases do they make use of when developing strategies there were five common answers which all three participants agreed on. 3 out of 3 participants (100%) agrees that there must be some type of preparation for potential crisis situations (pre-planning). The participants agree that the plan developed in pre-planning must be further developed for it to be a relevant action plan. Thereafter the plan must be implemented and executed through internal communication and lastly all participants agree that the implemented plan needs to be evaluated to determine the success thereof. The least common answer was given from 1 out of 3 participants (33.3%) mentioned that every situation is unique and that will affect the crisis communication strategy. 2 out of 3 participants (66.6%) said that within certain crisis situation there are different handling protocols and most employees involved knows what to do.

Question 6: How would you define the term planning phase?

P1: Developing possible solutions for possible crises.

P2: Clarifying roles, duties and responsibilities of employees.

P3: Steps on how to handle crises (action plan)

Quest on 6	
Themes	Code
Deve op ng poss b e so ut ons	27
C arfy ng: • Ro es • dutes • respons b tes	28
Act on P an	29

	Quest on 6
P1	27
P2	28
P3	29
Most common response	NONE
Least common response	ALL

When the part c pants were asked to def ne the term p ann ng phase no common answers were g ven 100% of the part c pants had the same bas c understand ng how ever def ned t a d fferent y.

Question 7: What do you think the executing phase consists of?

P1: Imp ement ng the poss b e so ut ons to the cr s s.

P2: Imp ement ng abovement oned and mak ng sure emp oyees know what s expected of them.

P3: When the steps are put nto act on and s mp emented.

Quest on 7	
Themes	Code
Implementing: • Possible solutions • Roles, duties and responsibilities • Steps into action	30

	Quest on 7
P1	30
P2	30
P3	30
Most common response	30
Least common response	NONE

When it came to answering the question of defining the term of executing 3 out of 3 participants (100%) answered with the same common word “implementing”. They independently agreed that the term executing had to do with implementing solutions, roles, duties, responsibilities and to put the necessary steps into action. With regards to this question there was no uncommon answer.

Question 8: How would you define the term managing phase?

P1: To manage risks and losses. We measure the success of implemented solutions by look at whether the company lost clients, gained or stayed the same.

P2: Evaluating, reporting measures to be in place.

P3: To determine the success of the implemented strategy plan, to ensure to plan is followed through and achieves what was intended for.

Quest on 8	
Themes	Code
Manage risk and losses	31
Measure success Report ng measurements	32
Look at whether the company lost cents, gained or stayed the same.	33
Evaluate Followed through	34
Intended	35

	Quest on 8
P1	31,32 & 33
P2	32 & 34
P3	32,34 & 35
Most common response	32 & 34
Least common response	31 & 35

When the participants were asked to define the term managing phase the two most common answers were to measure success and implement reporting measurements. 2 out of 3 participants associated it with evaluation and ensuring that the plan was followed through. 1 out of 3 participants (33.3%) said that managing phase can be seen as managing the company's risks and losses. Participant 1 stated that to evaluate the success of the implemented crisis communication strategy the organisation can look at whether cents were lost, gained or stayed the same. Lastly participant 3 mentioned that these phases determine whether the crisis communication strategies achieve what it was intended for.

Question 9: What practical steps do you take in the planning phase of developing a crisis communication strategy?

P1: Pre-planning for most crisis related crisis has been developed (employees involved knows where to start to solve crisis and ensure transparent communication regarding it.) they will be used in a manner like:

Using a diesel shortages crisis as an example:

- Call representatives and fleet manager.
- Arrange a meeting with supplier (start diesel shortage crisis).
- Confirm the crisis (diesel shortages in this case)
- Direct trucks supply clients by only with half of the order to ensure clients get at least some diesel.
- Establish the communication information that needs to be sent out to clients (look at facts, how diesel will be supplied, expected end date of shortages etc.)

P2: Meetings, emails, input from stakeholders

Prepare organogram provides certainty in the management – ensure employees know who to contact.

P3: Determine potential crisis or confirm that the crisis exists. Do a stakeholder analysis to determine who needs what type of communication.

Question 9	
Themes	Code
Employees: - employees involved knows where to start - employees know who to contact.	36
Communication: ensure transparent communication	37

• Establish the communication information that needs to be sent out to clients • Emails • determine who needs what type of communication.	
Stakeholders: • Client representatives and fleet manager. • Input from stakeholders	38
Meetings	39
Confirm the contracts	40
Diversify truck supply	41
Prepare organogram	42
Stakeholder analysis	43

	Question 9
P1	36,37,38,39,40 & 41
P2	36,37,38,39 & 42
P3	37,40 & 43
Most common response	36,37,38,39 & 40
Least common response	41,42 & 43

When the participants were asked what practical steps do you take in the planning phase of developing a crisis communication strategy, the participants said transparent communication is very important therefore, it is important to establish what information has to be sent out. 2 out of 3 participants stated that within the planning phase the employees know where to start and they know who to contact. 2 out of 3 (66.6%) mentioned one practical step involves stakeholders such as inform representatives and fleet manager about the crisis as well as to receive more input from involved stakeholders. 2 out of 3 participants (66.6%) agreed that meetings is also a practical step in the planning phase. Another (66.6%) states it is necessary to confirm whether the crisis is real. Participant 1 mentioned that with a diesel shortage crisis to plan that all clients receive diesel trucks have to be diverted. Participant 2 suggest preparing an organisation organogram and participant 3 suggests doing a stakeholder analysis as another practical step.

Question 10: What practical steps would you say Quantum Energy uses in their executing phase?

P1:

- Have a meeting
- Write a draft of the communication that could be sent out.
- Pay for diesel from supplier upfront to ensure availability.
- Phone major clients and give them information.
- Send out approved communication via email
- Follow up email or phone call to determine whether communication was received.

P2:

- Draft communication regarding crisis.
- Use WhatsApp groups and emails.
- Ensure employees know what needs to happen
- Send out communication to all necessary stakeholders.

P3:

- Confirm cr s s
- Write a etter/ema
- Confirm facts
- Add commun cat on onto etter head
- S gn by management
- Send commun cat on
- Fo ow up w th c ents to determ ne f they rece ved commun cat on

Quest on 10	
Themes	Code
Interna comm nat on: Meet ng Ensure emp oyees know what needs to happen	44
Draft of the commun cat on	45
Ensure ava ab ty	46
Phone major c ents	47
Send out approved commun cat on	48
Channe : Ema Use WhatsApp groups and ema s Wr te etter or ema	49
Fo ow up	50
Conf rm • Cr s s • Facts	51
Add commun cat on onto etter head	52

Signed by management	53
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	Question 10
P1	44,45,46,47,48,49 & 50
P2	44,45,48 & 49
P3	48,49,50,51,52 & 53
Most common response	44,45,48,49 & 50
Least common response	46,47,52 & 53

When the three participants were asked what practical steps are used in the executing phase of crisis communication strategies they all agreed that a easy to use communication channel must be used such as emails, WhatsApp or letters. 3 out of 3 participants (100%) agreed that the communication must be approved before being sent out. 2 out of 3 participants (66.6%) states a practical step must include internal communication such as meetings and ensuring that employees know what to do. 2 out of 3 participants (66.6%) says drafting communication is another important practical step. Less common answers mentioned by 1 out of 3 participants (33.3%) ensure the availability of desks in a desk shortages crisis, phone major clients to inform them about the current crisis. 2 out of 3 participants (66.6%) agrees that it is very important to follow up whether communication was received. 1 out of 3 participants (33.3%) mentioned to confirm the crisis and facts of the crisis as well as to ensure communication is sent out with organization letterhead and signed by management.

Question 11: What practical steps would you use in the managing phase?

P1: Again the best way to determine success of the evaluation phase is to look at client list and determined whether clients were lost or not. As well as ensure consistent monitoring of crisis and send regular communication updates to high value clients.

P2: E m nate contrad ct ng nformat on, ensur ng commun cat on to a stakeho ders, and eva uate performance eve s.

P3: Regu ar y eva uat ng c ent reta nment, determ ne f commun cat on was successfu .

Quest on 11	
Themes	Code
C ents: look at c ent st determ ned whether c ents were ost or not Regu ar y eva uat ng c ent reta nment	54
cons stent mon tor ng of cr s s	55
send regu ar commun cat on updates to h gh va ue c ents.	56
E m nate contrad ct ng nformat on	57
ensur ng commun cat on determ ne f commun cat on was successfu .	58
eva uate performance eve s	59

	Quest on 11
P1	54,55 & 56
P2	57,58 & 59
P3	54 & 58
Most common response	54 & 58

Least common response	55,56 & 59
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When the participants were asked what practical steps were used on the managing phase 2 out of 3 participants (66.6%) states mentioned clients are vitally important to determine whether the crisis communication strategy was successful. 1 out of 3 participants (33.3%) says a practical step is consistent monitoring and regular communication updates to high value clients. 1 out of 3 participants (33.3%) suggests eliminating contradictory information and evaluate performance levels of employees to determine the success of the strategy.

Question 12: Do you think having a step-by-step practical guide (that can be adjusted depending on the crisis) of how to handle crisis communication could be helpful? Elaborate on your statement.

P1: Yes, it would benefit the organisation, it would allow for fewer mistakes to be made as well as involved employees would know how to go about handling the crisis.

P2: Yes, a crisis situation is usually accompanied by uncertainty and panic, not knowing how to handle a situation and possibility of financial loss or damage or loss of life, or damage to reputation does not contribute to the effective dealing with crises and communication thereof. Acting impulsively or unadvisedly may aggravate situation. Therefore a guide could be helpful.

P3: Definitely, this would allow for employees to know what to do in certain crisis situations as well as determine the scale of the crisis.

Quest on 12	
Themes	Code
Yes	60
allow for fewer mistakes	61
involved employees would know how to go about handling the crisis.	62

know ng how to hand e a s tuat on	
a emp oyees to know what to do	
poss b ty of f nanc a oss or damage or oss of fe, or damage to reputat on does not contr bute to the effect ve dea ng w th cr ses and commun cat on thereof	63
Act ng mpus ve y or unadv sed y may aggravate s tuat on	64
gu de ne cou d be he pfu	65
determ ne the sca e of the cr s s	66

	Quest on 12
P1	60,61 & 62
P2	60,62,63,64 & 65
P3	60,62
Most common response	60,62 & 66
Least common response	61,63,64,65 & 66

The part c pants were asked f a step-by-step pract ca gu de (that can be adjusted depend ng on the cr s s) on how to hand e cr s s commun cat on cou d be he pfu ? A part c pants (100%) agreed that t wou d be he pfu to have such a gu de. 1 out of 3 part c pants (33.3%) ment oned t cou d a ow for fewer m stakes. 3 out of 3 part c pants (100%) says t cou d a ow nvo ved emp oyees w know how to go about hand ng the cr s s s tuat on and know what s expected of them. 1 out of 3 part c pants (33.3%) ment oned that t cou d poss b y contr bute to effect ve dea ng w th cr s s and the commun cat on thereof cou d he p prevent f nanc a oss or damage or oss of fe, or

damage to reputat on. 1 out of 3 part c pants (33.3%) says a gu de ne cou d be he pfu because t reduces mpu s ve act ng that m ght aggravate the s tuat on. Part c pant 3 states that t cou d he p determ ne the sca e of the cr s s.

Question 13: When looking at previous crisis communication strategies, how does being prepared for a crisis help?

P1: It a ows for **ess m stakes** to be made, **saves the company s money** and **avo ds bad pub c ty.**

P2: **It he ps to be ready** w th a type of strategy but t s **not a ways poss b e** as **cr s s s tuat ons d ffers.**

P3: **A ot**, take for nstances w th the frst d ese shortages the company faced no one rea y knew what to do and how to go about so v ng and commun cate about the prob em.

After that we were ab e to set up a cr s s commun cat on strategy for when t happens aga n and t d d. Th s t me around **emp oyees and management knew exact y what to do** and how to commun cate w th stakeho ders.

Quest on 13	
Themes	Code
ess m stakes	67
saves the company's money	68
avo ds bad pub c ty.	69
It he ps to be ready	70
not a ways poss b e	71
cr s s s tuat ons d ffers.	72
A ot	73

first these shortages no one really knew what to do	74
After that we were able to set up a crisis communication strategy	75
employees and management knew exactly what to do	76

	Quest on 13
P1	67,68 & 69
P2	70,71 & 72
P3	73,74,75 & 76
Most common response	NONE
Least common response	ALL

When asked how does being prepared for a crisis help there were no common answers each participant had their own view. Participant 1 said that would allow for less mistakes, avoid bad publicity and can save the organisation money. Participant 2 said that does help to be ready however it's not always possible because crisis situations differ, Participant 3 said that helps to be prepared for instances with the first these crisis no one knew what to do, after that the organisation was able to develop crisis communication strategy. Now employees and management knows exactly what to do when a disaster shortages crisis happens again.

Question 14: How vital is crisis communication strategies' success for the organisation?

P1: Very vital, it helps to ensure that everyone involved is informed and receives communication, it allows for first hand accurate information being sent out by the organisation and when crisis communication is sent to clients directly it avoids social media bias.

P2: Strategies are essential for effective and efficient actions and successful business.

P3: Very, without clients will not receive product and information leading to unhappy clients that might go somewhere else.

Quest on 14	
Themes	Code
Very Strategies are essential	77
Communication: ensure that everyone involved is informed and receives communication receive product and information	78
first hand accurate information being sent out	79
avoid social media based.	80
effective and efficient actions and successful business.	81

	Quest on 14
P1	77,78,79 & 80
P2	77 & 81
P3	77 & 78
Most common response	77 & 78
Least common response	79,80 & 81

The last question asked the participants whether or not communication strategies are essential for organisational success. 3 out of 3 participants (100%) agreed that strategies are essential and very essential. 2 out of 3 participants said that communication is important to ensure that everyone involved is informed and receives communication and receives product and information. 1 out of 3 participants (33.3%) said that allows for first

hand accurate information to be sent out and it helps avoid social media bias. Part c part 3 emphasises that strategies can help with effective and efficient actions and successful business.

7.5. Annexure E: Permission given to researcher



Gatekeepers Approval

Consent form to conduct research at my company	
I, [REDACTED]	
Representative of QUANTUM ENERGY CC	
My capacity: [REDACTED]	
Give my permission that DANIELLE MYNHARDT may conduct research at my company. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time. I also understand that research reports are available in the library and IIE Repository unless I indicate below that I would not	
Select below:	
☐ I request that my company's identity be kept confidential.	
☒ My company can be identified in the study ✓	
☐ The study may never be available on the repository.	
☒ The study may be made available on the repository. ✓	
☐ The study may be made available on the repository after months.	
Signature [REDACTED]	Date 2020.07.26



Gatekeepers letter/ Request to conduct research

Dear

I am writing to ask your permission to conduct research at your business Quantum Energy CC

My name is Daniellé Mynhardt, a Honours in Communication student at the Varsity College Sandton a brand of the Independent Institute of Education (IIE). The research I wish to conduct for my Honours Project titled An exploratory qualitative study on the processes followed in the planning, executing and managing phases of developing crisis communication strategies within Quantum Energy CC using a semi-structured interview.

The aim of this study is THE PROCESSES FOLLOWED IN THE PLANNING, EXECUTING AND MANAGING PHASES OF CRISES COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES WITHIN QUANTUM ENERGY.

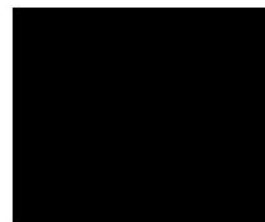
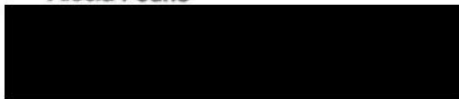
The nature of your firm's participation will be your crisis communication strategies, members and managers, interviews will be done in one day (30 min each) at the Quantum Energy office on any suitable date in August 2020.

Yours sincerely
Student: Daniellé Mynhardt
Supervisor: Alecia Fourie

My contact details are as follows:
Danielle Mynhardt



The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:
Alecia Fourie





CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING

Consent form for participants	
I, [REDACTED] agree to allow DANIELLE MYNHARDT to audio record my interviews as part of the research about THE PROCESSES FOLLOWED IN THE PLANNING, EXECUTING AND MANAGING PHASES OF CRISES COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES WITHIN QUANTUM ENERGY CC.	
This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:	
• My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
Signature	Date
[REDACTED]	2020-07-26

Consent form for participants	
I, [REDACTED] agree to participate in the research conducted by DANIELLE MYNHARDT about THE PROCESSES FOLLOWED IN THE PLANNING, EXECUTING AND MANAGING PHASES OF CRISES COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES WITHIN QUANTUM ENERGY CC.	
This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:	
• I agree to be interviewed for this research. ☒ • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research. • I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview. • I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
Signature	Date
[REDACTED]	2020-07-26

7.6. Annexure F: Final Research Report Table

Concept Document Template - TITLE: An exploratory qualitative study on the processes followed when developing crisis communication strategies at a Mpumalanga based company.

Research Purpose/ Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/ Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method(s)	Ethics	Findings	Recommendations
The purpose of this research proposal is to identify which practical steps are used in the planning, executing and managing of crisis communication strategies within Quantum Energy cc.	What processes are followed when developing a crisis communication strategy? Sub questions: What processes take place in the planning and executing phases? What processes are used to manage crisis communication strategies?	Organisations are a big part of society and the way it handles a crisis influences its reputation and success, therefore researching the steps and phases of developing strategies can be seen as crucial.	W. Timothy Coombs Kayla Christine Murphy Yang Cheng Andreas Bäckström Svensson and Njord Frölander Miko McFarland and Jason Hope	Theme 1: Crisis Communication strategies Theme 2: Link between crisis communication strategies and situational crisis communication theory Theme 3: Effective crisis communication Theme 4: Crisis response and timing	Paradigm <i>Interpretivism,</i> Epistemology Knowledge that is known to be common sense helps people by guiding them in their daily lives. It states that in order to understand people's behaviour, you need to know what they regard as common sense. Ontology Reality is a Social constructions are formed based on how people experience the world and interact with other people. Human experiences refers to people within the organisation usually in the public relations department that have developed crisis communication strategies Axiology This research study values, uniqueness, honesty and transparency to ensure data is credible and valid.	Qualitative Population Population Parameters MUST: work for Quantum Energy CC in a management position that assists in the development of crisis communication strategies. Must have 5 years minimum work experience at QE. target population is all diesel sales and logistic companies in South Africa. Accessible population employees of the sales and logistic company Quantum Energy CC in Standerton.	Semi-structured interviews	Permission must be obtained from Quantum Energy CC and written consent from participants. Confidentiality and anonymity must be provided. The researcher must be unbiased, objective and respectful and considerate following correct channels and not impact Quantum Energy's reputation. Email and written agreement and consent. Ensure questions aren't leading stay objective throughout interview.	Determined the practical steps QE uses in developing crisis communication strategies. Identified that the three phases can assist with the development of strategies. Continuous monitoring is important to ensure communication messages was received successfully.	That further research needs to be done in order to create a step-by step practical guide on how to develop crisis communication strategies within different organisations. The researcher recommends that crisis communication strategies must consist of planning, executing and monitoring.
Research Problem	Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theories			Sampling	Data Analysis Method(s)	Limitations	Anticipated Contribution	
The problem is that it is unclear which practical steps are followed in developing a successful crisis communication strategy within Quantum Energy.	To determine what takes place in the planning phase of crisis communication strategies. To establish whether, continuous managing and monitoring of crisis communication strategies should take place. To establish whether QE has an executing phase for their crisis communication strategies. To determine how QE plans on managing crisis communication strategies that have been implemented.	Crisis Practical steps Crisis communication strategies Planning Phase Executing Phase Controlling Evaluating Managing Phase Importance Stakeholders Intangible assets Reputation Crisis management	Situational Crisis Communication Theory			Non-probability, Sampling method Quota sampling Size Three people	Unit of Analysis employees in managing positions within Quantum Energy CC Standerton. Data Analysis Method(s) Thematic analysis	This study can be time consuming. Research can influence interviewees answers. The study is limited to gather data only from QE. To ensure credibility and validity confirm answers you are uncertain about.	To encourage other researchers to customise a step by step guide for developing crisis communication strategies that can be used in most organisation that will help in developing a successful strategy. A better understanding of crisis communication strategies	The researcher recommends that the importance on these strategies must be emphasised in order for more organisations to successfully communicate with stakeholders.