
How the relationship between the crisis life cycle and mass media content can better inform crisis communication.

Gwyneth Howell, University of Western Sydney
Dr Rohan Miller, University of Sydney

Crises are unpredictable events that can impact on an organisation's viability, credibility, and reputation, and few topics have generated greater interest in communication over the past 15 years. This paper builds on early theory such as Fink (1986), and extends the crisis life-cycle theoretical model to enable a better understanding and prediction of the changes and trends of mass media coverage during crises. This expanded model provides a framework to identify and understand the dynamic and multi-dimensional set of relationships that occurs during the crisis life cycle in a rapidly changing and challenging operational environment. Using the 2001 Ansett Airlines' Easter groundings as a case study, this paper monitors mass media coverage during this organisational crisis. The analysis reinforces the view that, by using proactive strategies, public relations practitioners can better manage mass media crisis coverage. Further, the understanding gained by extending the crisis life cycle to track when and how mass media content changes may help public relations practitioners craft messages and supply information at the outset of each stage of the crisis, thereby maintaining control of the message.

Introduction

Crises are unpredictable events that can impact on an organisation's viability, credibility and reputation (Baker, 2001; Mitroff, Shrivastava, & Udvardia, 1987). They are a prominent feature of the business environment with the potential to damage any organisation (Baker, 2001; Mitroff & Alpasian, 2003; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Williams & Olaniran, 2001). Examples of organisational

crises that have received extensive mass media coverage include: the nuclear accidents at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island; the Exxon Valdez oil spill; Tylenol pain relief package tampering; Dow Corning breast implant litigation; the collapse of Enron; and the James Hardie Industries asbestos case. As organisations use mass media to communicate with stakeholders during crises (Arpan & Pompper, 2003; Fearn-Banks, 1996), the way mass media frame the coverage can impact on such an organisation (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Patterson, 2004). The media's influence over a crisis has evolved with the digital revolution to instantaneous, exhaustive, global coverage (Barr, 2000; Kimmel, 2004; Michelson & Mouly, 2002;).

This paper extends the crisis life cycle theoretical model (c.f. Barton, 1993; Fearn-Banks, 1996; Fink, 1986; Mitroff, 1996;) to better predict the changes and trends of mass media coverage during crises. The expanded model provides a framework to identify and understand the dynamic and multi-dimensional set of relationships that occur during the crisis life cycle in a rapidly changing and challenging operational environment. Most crisis communication literature focuses on communicating to stakeholders during the turmoil generated by a crisis (e.g., Courtright & Hearit, 2002; Marra, 1992; Stephens, Malone & Bailey 2005;). This model, however, provides a working framework whereby proactive strategies for effective monitoring and management of mass media coverage in the initial or warning stage of a crisis can be developed. Little research in crisis management has integrated public relations, marketing, and management disciplines, with most focused on the effective management of crises by

organisations from a business perspective (Barton, 1993; Burson, 1985; Dutton, 1986; Kelly, 1989; Mitroff et al., 1987). Other preliminary research into mass communication and crises has examined the role of mass media and explored methods employed to disseminate information to various stakeholders before, during, and after crises (Scanlon, 1983; Wilkins & Patterson, 1987). The investigations of Fink (1986), Marra (1992), Fearn-Banks (1996), Coombs (1999, 2002), Williams and Olaniran (2001), Courtright and Hearit (2002), and Stephens, Malone and Bailey (2005), indicate that crisis research has developed from prescriptive response strategy lists, to early theory and model development, to better understanding of the complex nature of crises. Until recently, proactive public relations management has been overlooked as a helpful tool for the successful management of organisational crises (Coombs, 2002; Fearn-Banks, 1996). Typically, the premise of crisis communication was to offset the potential negative consequences (Mitroff, 1996, 2001, 2003) that usually occur when organisations fail to respond to ‘warning’ signs of impending crisis (Fink, 1986).

Crisis life-cycle

The crisis life-cycle model is derived from the marketing product life-cycle model, which typically maps sales or consumption data over time. Product life-cycle theory suggests organisations should develop and implement marketing strategies pursuant with a service or product’s position relative to four stages of the product life-cycle (Kotler, 1991). Kotler (1991) asserts that marketers using the product life-cycle framework can manage products more successfully. The concept that crises also progress in a certain manner, or follow a cycle, was developed in the early 1980s and is consistent with crisis management literature from this period (Barton, 1993; Coombs, 1999; Fink, 1986; Mitroff, 1996; Sturges, 1994). As marketing researchers used the product life cycle to interpret product and market dynamics, Fink (1986) applied the crisis life-cycle model to better understand crisis behaviours. Fink’s

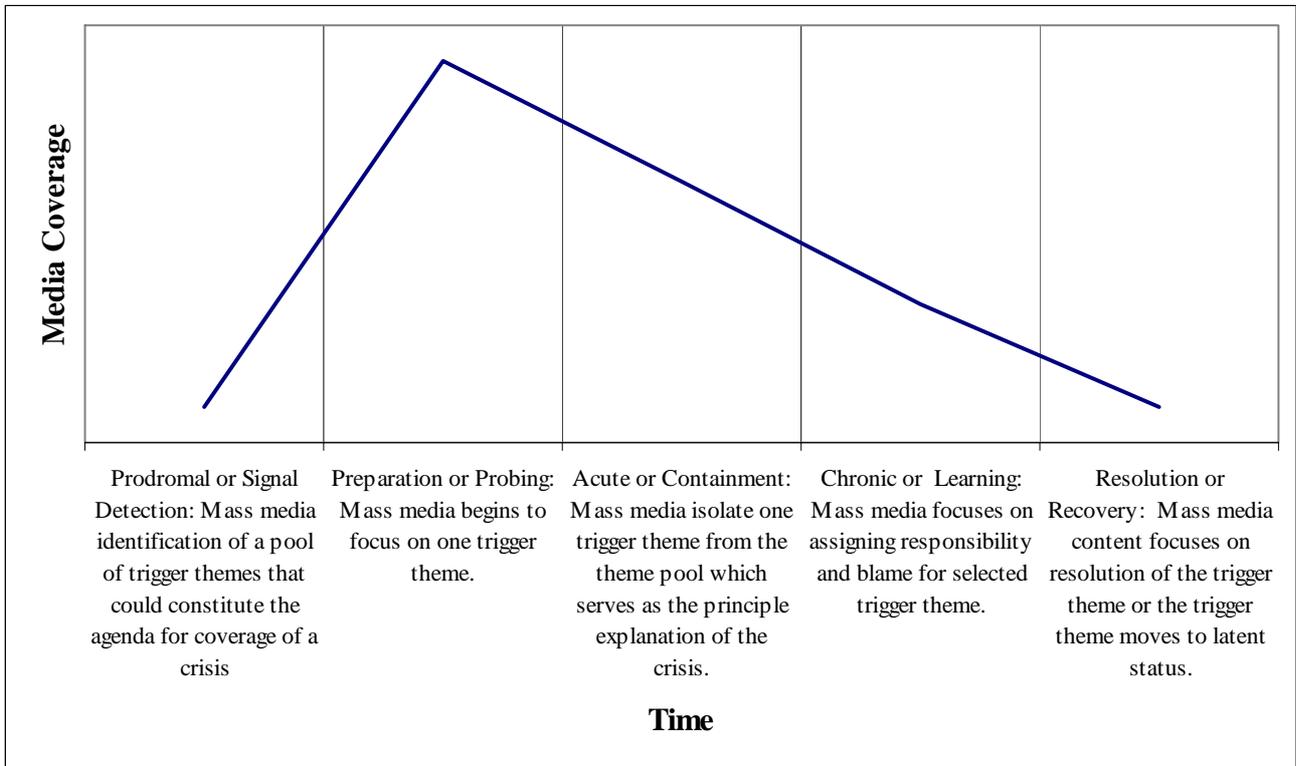
(1986) original model presents four distinct phases of a crisis: prodromal, acute, chronic, and resolution.

As reflected in **Figure 1**, Fink’s original crisis life cycle has been further developed by Barton (1993), Mitroff (1996), and others to include an additional and vital (second) phase before the acute crisis stage. This phase, called the probing or preparation phase, is what Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1996) identified as the opportunity for ‘crisis killing’.

In general, the crisis management literature acknowledges the need to approach each of the five stages with an individual management strategy to best manage the different dynamics and dimensions of each stage (Barton, 1993; Fearn-Banks 1996; Mitroff, 1996). The general framework for crisis communication presented in the literature makes the assumption that mass media coverage is important as it influences stakeholders’ opinions during a crisis (Egelhoff & Sen, 1992). However, the literature does not specifically address changes in the content of mass media coverage during the crisis (Fink, 1986; Mitroff, 1996).

This paper suggests that the amended crisis life-cycle model is a robust framework within which mass media coverage during a crisis can be predicted and managed. **Figure 1** (overleaf) presents the theoretical foundation of the extended crisis lifecycle framework and outlines the changing themes in mass media coverage during a crisis. We contend that each stage of the crisis life cycle contains different themes in mass media coverage, and each theme exhibits attributes pertinent to the stage to which it is allocated. The researchers have mapped the mass media content during each stage of the crisis using the Ansett safety crisis to illustrate our model.

Figure 1: Crisis life cycle and media coverage over time



The Ansett case

Australia’s Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) grounded Ansett Airlines’ entire fleet of ten Boeing 767 aircraft on Thursday, 12 April 2001. The grounding was a result of what CASA termed Ansett’s ongoing structural, management, and personnel problems, and lack of proper control in the planning and execution of maintenance. The Easter 2001 grounding of Ansett cost the company \$4.24 million and 20% of its market share (Goodsir, 2001). To minimise these costs, there was a crucial need for adept crisis management tactics and a cohesive communication strategy. It is proposed that the extended crisis life cycle model provides the framework to track and respond to mass media coverage at each stage, rather than undertake what is the usual practice of one media response throughout all stages of the crisis.

For the purpose of this study, the principal focus was on identifying and describing themes

in mass media content during the crisis rather than the effect these frames might have had on public opinion. Content analysis of print mass media only has been selected for this study. The data are drawn from four major Australian newspapers, *The Australian*, *The Financial Review*, *The Age*, and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. This paper explores the complex chain of themes (patterns) over time, tracking one trigger theme during the stages of the extended crisis life cycle model over a 6-month period, and examining the relationships among independent, intervening, and dependent variables.

The research material consisted of 269 newspapers articles where the name ‘Ansett’ and the word ‘safety’ appeared during the period January 1, 2001, to June 30, 2001. The articles were used as units of analysis, and their headline, position, and content were examined. Each article was classified according to a defined set of criteria presented in **Appendix A**. The focal ‘trigger theme’, drawn from a pool of

general themes, was 'Ansett safety'. This trigger theme was selected after a count of all Ansett content in print media during the first six months of 2001. The researchers classified the units simultaneously to achieve intercoder reliability.

The focal trigger theme – the most frequent of the trigger themes in the study – was Ansett's safety record regarding its 767-200 fleet. This theme appeared on 105 occasions (67%). The other trigger themes identified in the press content were: (a) Ansett's purchase of Hazelton Airlines, (b) price war between four domestic carriers, (c) aircraft delays due to service failures, (d) Ansett's financial stability, (e) Singapore Airlines' proposed purchase of Ansett, (f) CASA investigations, (g) CASA Chief's ability questioned, (h) declining passenger numbers, (i) Qantas purchase of Impulse Airlines, and (j) decline of the Ansett's share price. One or more of these trigger themes appeared on 54 occasions (33 %) in print mass media content. The focal trigger theme did not appear in the newspapers sampled during March, 2001. The trigger themes during this period were 'financial stability for Ansett Airlines' and 'Singapore Airlines' proposed purchase of Ansett Airlines'. (See **Chart 1.**)

Phase One – Terms: prodromal (Fink & Barton); signal detection (Mitroff); detection (Fearn-Banks)

Researchers define the first stage of the model as the 'crisis build up' or prodromal phase. The model predicts that during the initial phase of a crisis, prodromes (issues that have the potential to become crises) appear as small news stories in mass media. Egelhoff and Sen (1992) support this claim in their development of a contingency model for managing a variety of corporate crises with the assertion that "... 'triggering events' typically occur within the environment with which the organisation is

familiar and coverage of which often appears in mass media" (p. 467). Sturges (1994) defined this type of coverage as a trigger theme that can pose a potential threat to an organisation. Organisations that remain sensitive to their environment, and monitor mass media coverage and relevant trends in coverage, are better positioned to recognise the development of crises (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001).

The model suggests that mass media coverage will contain a pool of trigger themes, each presenting a brief discussion on active prodromes. The level of analysis and detail of each trigger theme in mass media is low and such themes appear as minor news stories. Trigger themes do not receive in-depth analysis or exhaustive scrutiny by mass media. Pearson and Clair (1998) assert that when organisations choose not to respond to trigger themes, mass media may report rumours to fill the void. The trigger themes appear as symptoms or precursors to crises in mass media coverage and are a vital first factor in tracking mass media content through the expanded model. If the triggers are recognised by the organisation, it can implement activities to develop benefits or reduce the negative impact of the possible crisis (Barton, 1993; Fearn-Banks, 1996; Mitroff, 1996). Barton (1993), Mitroff (1996), Fearn-Banks (1996), and Seymour and Moore (2000) contend that management of the message can diminish the impact of the impending crisis and lessen the potential impact of the prodromal triggers.

Consistent with the model, seven different trigger themes, including the focal trigger theme selected for the study, appeared in newspaper coverage of Ansett Airlines during January 2001. Numerous triggers appeared in the media, and as far as can be judged by the media coverage in the sample, Ansett's management failed to respond, or attempt to address, any of the triggers.

Chart 1: Ansett Airlines newspaper coverage identified by theme from January 1, 2001 to June 30, 2001

Mass Media Content Themes						
Month	Trigger	Explanation	Blame	Responsibility	Resolution	Latent
Jan	18	14				
Feb	8	5	0	0	0	0
Mar	6	0	0	0	0	0
Apr	61	58	25	25	2	5
May	8	4	3	4	1	12
June	6	0	0	0	0	4

Phase Two – preparation (Barton) probing (Mitroff) prevention (Fearn-Banks)

The addition of phase two to Fink’s (1986) original model is significant, as researchers assert management of trigger themes can prevent a crisis from progressing, thereby reducing potential harm and cost to the organisation. Barton (1993), Mitroff (1996, 2001, 2003), and Seymour and Moore (2000), claim the key to crisis management is control of the message. The media’s ability to communicate news as soon as it happens has forced organisations to develop crisis strategies that can be implemented expeditiously (Fink, 1986). Our model predicts that trigger themes will continue to appear in mass media coverage and that how the theme is managed is therefore vital. Pines (1985) supports this prediction, asserting that management, at this stage of the crisis, should focus solely on taking care of any causes, controlling damage, and returning the organisation to normal operating conditions as quickly as possible. Failure to respond effectively to the crisis can often bring unwanted reactions (Mitroff, 2001; Pines, 1985). Lack of organisational message management means control is relinquished to the mass media, and the media will retain control throughout the remainder of the crisis and drive agendas according to their specific aims and objectives (Ogrizek & Guillery, 1999; Stephens et al. 2005). In the Ansett example, coverage of the various triggers continued, focusing on the age of Ansett’s 767 fleet and

maintenance issues relating to the engines on these aircraft.

Phase Three – acute (Fink); containment (Barton, Mitroff, and Fearn-Banks)

This is the shortest and most intense stage of a crisis, when the issue breaks out of the trigger theme (prodrome) phase and evolves into an ‘actual’ crisis. Fink (1986) and others argue that crises actually begin before the acute phase. The result of fiscal, physical, or emotional damage to the organisation and its stakeholders is typically reported in mass media (Courtright & Hearit, 2002). The model predicts that, during this phase, the trigger theme associated with the specific prodrome will be the focus of mass media content, and mass media coverage will evolve to extensive discussions about the actual crisis.

The focal trigger theme acts as the primary vehicle by which an audience comes to understand the crisis. The grounding of Ansett’s 767 fleet two days before the Easter break, meant the travel plans of more than 170,000 people were affected by the airline’s failure to maintain its fleet of 10 planes and by CASA’s decision to ground the aircraft (Wainwright, 2001). As suggested by our model, mass media coverage of Ansett explored and discussed in detail the events leading to CASA’s decision. Further mass media coverage provided insight into those passengers whose travel plans had been affected by the groundings and illustrated how the company, through failing to heed the warning signs in the media coverage, lost

control of the message to its stakeholders. The acute stage of the crisis exhibited several attributes predicted by the model. First, the crisis proved to be a critical distraction for Ansett, causing vast disruption to its normal business operations. Second, the crisis attracted increased government and media scrutiny. CASA commenced a complete review of all Ansett's operations and the Australian Government instigated an inquiry into the company's safety and maintenance activities. The number of newspaper articles published increased dramatically during the acute crisis stage, moving Ansett's 767 safety record from an 'undisclosed problem to a receptacle of attention' (Fink, 1986 p. 23). The press coverage explored and described the level of safety provided in the Australian domestic air travel market since deregulation. The credibility of Ansett's safety and maintenance records were open for investigation by the mass media as various parties sought to explore how the crisis had occurred. The financial stability of the airline was already under investigation by sections of the mass media, and the crisis increased the financial market's awareness of Ansett's burgeoning debt and issues with its operations. The company's share price dropped, and customer confidence in the airline was at an all-time low (Caruana, 2001).

The high level of coverage tends to mirror the intensity of the stage of the actual crisis in crisis life-cycle model. During this intense period, it is vital the organisation responds to media requests and maintains control of the message. Proactive media management is required, with clear concise information released in a timely manner.

Phase Four – chronic (Fink); learning (Barton, Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt) damage containment (Mitroff) recovery (Fearn-Banks)

Our model predicts that mass media coverage during this stage will be driven by criminal and civil charges, government inquiries, litigation, and responses from affected stakeholders. During this stage Fearn-Banks (1996) recommended that the organisation undertake an

audit of the events, activities, and mass media coverage of the crisis to date, and seek to take advantage of successful management activities and learn from failures. As the effects of crises can be experienced by organisations for years (Barton, 1993; Fink, 1986; Mitroff, 1996), management of the message in the media is important. Mass media coverage can prolong the effects of the crisis on an organisation. The model predicts that the crisis will be revisited by mass media during legal proceedings, raising stakeholders' awareness of the trigger theme and revisiting the events and mass media coverage in a chronological order.

The mass media scrutiny of Ansett and subsequently of CASA was hostile in the chronic stage. Members of the media obtained copies of CASA's December 2000 report into Ansett's maintenance of its 767 fleet (Wainwright, 2001), sought the opinions of Boeing, and allocated blame and responsibility for the crisis. In light of CASA's grounding of the 767 fleet, Ansett adopted a strategy of victimisation. Ansett's managing director intentionally sought to assign blame to CASA for the crisis (Caruana, 2001); however Ansett was ultimately forced to accept responsibility for the maintenance failures.

Phase Five – resolution (Fink) recovery (Barton, Mitroff) learning (Fearn-Banks)

In the final stage, journalists seek to resolve the trigger theme and summarise how the crisis occurred, who and/or what was to blame or responsible for the crisis, and what can be drawn from the events as lessons for the future. When organisations are unable to resolve the events that have created the trigger theme, the theme then moves to latent status and remains there until another event reactivates the trigger theme and brings it back into prominence. It is in the organisation's interests that trigger themes not be allowed to move to the latent stage, as the potential for a new cycle of damage to the organisation remains.

Crises do not occur in isolation, they occur as one component of the organisational environment. Other prodromes and trigger themes will progress simultaneously through

their own crisis life cycles. Resolution of trigger themes is directly linked to the management of the crisis by an organisation, and resolution can only be achieved through management action. Ansett took three major corrective actions to restore its public image and gain CASA's approval to continue to operate. First, Ansett announced the sale of its fleet of 767-200s and plans to purchase a new fleet. Second, Ansett announced it would appoint 400 new maintenance workers to expand the company's service and maintenance program. Finally, to restore customer confidence, the 'Absolutely' advertising campaign was launched in May 2001 (cost, \$30 million), to entice customers back to Ansett.

Conclusions

Campbell (1999) views the crisis process as one of continual improvement. That is also true for public relations research and practice. This extension of the crisis life cycle to track when and how mass media content changes, provides further guidance for public relations practitioners, allowing them the opportunity to better predict media coverage and thereby craft messages and supply information at the outset of each stage. Ultimately, this should assist with maintaining better control of the mass-mediated message.

Research illustrates that a range of generic media relations tools can be effectively used as tactics in crisis communication. The specific mass media component which we have added to the standard crisis life-cycle model provides guideposts for when these tactics should be employed. It suggests that different key messages should be developed to best manage the likely frames in the mass media during each stage. This is supported by the recent study of Stephen, Malone, and Bailey (2005) whose research indicated that "different crisis-message strategies...to communicate to different stakeholders" (p. 407) will increase the organisation's ability to manage the crisis situation they face. As the content of mass media coverage is different at each stage, so too would the organisation develop different key messages to address each of these stages.

However, for this new model to be properly utilised it is vital that management realise that "public relations...is an important part of top management" (Fearn-Banks 2001, p. 481). According to Marra (1998), "communication autonomy is the amount of power and responsibility an organisation gives its public relations staff" (p. 467). Research of organisations with excellent communications (Cornelissen, 2004) has shown that management need to believe public relations departments should be characterized by participation in strategic management, especially during crisis situations. In times of crisis the public relations strategy for disclosing information will often conflict with the legal recommendations for the organisation (Arpan & Pompper, 2003). This new model would enable public relations and legal teams to work together to craft messages that achieve both areas' objectives in terms of crisis management.

The way Ansett chose to manage aspects of the communication of the 2001 Easter grounding crisis can be easily criticised, but it is important to note significant qualifications. Attempting to simplify complex and multi-dimensional issues related to this crisis is not beneficial. The actions taken by Ansett during the crisis resulted from multi-faceted organisational processes; however, a largely reactive crisis communication strategy appears to have been implemented by the organisation. The organisation did not appear to develop different messages or release specific information appropriate to each stage of the crisis, rather information was released in an ad hoc, reactive manner. We contend that proactive, phased media management and life-cycle-relevant crisis communication strategies would have resulted in a better-managed crisis.

Finally, the most critical stage in the crisis life cycle is the learning and evaluation stage where organisations have the opportunity to improve future practice and improve and increase the organisation's memory (Mitroff, 2003). Hence if, as Wolfensohn (cited in Campbell, 1999, p. 8) asserts, "crises make us

smarter...and fix things we know are wrong but are too busy to mend”, then public relations practitioners using the mass media content crisis life-cycle model presented here will be better informed and prepared to manage crisis communication. This expanded mass media tracking model makes public relations practitioners aware that mass media themes and content change throughout a crisis, enabling what Deveney (2005) asserts is the key to effective crisis management: the delivery of quality, timely information.

The literature does not provide a definitive structure for the demarcation of each stage of the crisis life cycle, and this would be essential in the development of the expanded model in terms of mass media content. This is an area for further research, as is replicating this initial investigation on a range of different crises.

Preventing crises from occurring, through the practice of issues management, is a key goal of public relations professionals. As former Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans argued, “a true triumph is for nothing to happen, and that by definition is not very sexy” (cited in Cameron, 2001, p. 2). However, should a crisis strike, the new mass media crisis life-cycle model will help maintain control of the key messages and set the agenda during the event.

References

- Arpan, L. M., & Pompper, D. (2003). Stormy weather: testing ‘stealing thunder’ as a crisis communication strategy to improve communication flow between organisations and journalists. *Public Relations Review*, 29(3), 291–308.
- Baker, G. F. (2001). Race and reputation: Restoring image beyond the crisis in health. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of Public Relations* (pp. 513–520). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Barr, T. (2000). *newmedia.com.au*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.
- Barton, L. (1993) *Crisis in organisations: Managing and communicating in the heat of chaos*. Cincinnati, Ohio: South-Western Publishing Company.
- Burson, H. (1985). Damage control in a crisis. *Management Review*, 74(12), 42–45.
- Cameron, D. (2001, April 13) Ansett’s long haul to clear the air. *The Sydney Morning Herald* pp.1–2.
- Campbell, R. (1999). *Crisis control: Preventing & managing corporate crises*. Camberwell, Victoria: Penguin Group (Australia).
- Caruana, L. (2001, April 25). Defiant Toomey takes the offensive. *The Australian*, p. 3.
- Coombs, W. T. (1995). Choosing the right words: The development of guidelines for the selection of the ‘appropriate’ crisis-response strategies. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 8(4), 447–477.
- Coombs, W. T. (1999). *Ongoing crisis communication: planning, managing, and responding*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Coombs, W. T. (2002). Deep and surface threats: conceptual and practical implications for ‘crisis’ vs. ‘problem’. *Public Relations Review*, 28(4), 339–345.
- Cornelissen, J. (2004). *Corporate communications theory and practice*. London: Sage.
- Courtright, J. L., & Hearit, K. M. (2002). The good organisation speaking well: a paradigm case for religious institutional crisis management. *Public Relations Review*, 28(4), 347–360.
- Deveney, J. (2005). Candor speaks volumes. *Communication World*, 22(3), S4–5.
- Dutton, J. E. (1986). The processing of crisis and non-crisis strategic issues. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25(5), 501–517.
- Egelhoff, W. G., & Sen, F. (1992). An information-processing model of crisis management. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 5(4): 443–484.
- Evans, N., & Elphick S. (2005). Models of crisis management: an evaluation of their value for strategic planning in the international travel industry. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 7(3), 135.
- Fearn-Banks, K. (1996). *Crisis communications: A casebook approach*. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Fink, S. (1986). *Crisis management: Planning for the inevitable*. New York, N.Y: American Management Association.
- Gonzalez-Herrero, A., & Pratt, C. B. (1996). An integrated symmetrical model for crisis-communications management. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 8(2), 79–105.

- Goodsir, D (May 27, 2001) Ansett sales fall after safety crisis. *The Age*, p. 8.
- Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Heath, R. L. (Ed.). (2001). *Handbook of public relations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Johnson J., & Zawawi C. (2004) *Public relations: Theory and practice* (2nd Ed.) Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Kelly, S. (1989). Battling a crisis in advance. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 34(1), 6–8.
- Kimmel, A. J. (2004). *Rumours and rumour control: A manager's guide to understanding and combating rumours*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kotler, P. (1991). *Marketing management* (8th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Marra, F. J. (1992). *Crisis public relations: A theoretical model*. College of Journalism, Ann Arbor MI: University of Maryland College Park.
- Marra, F. J. (1998). Crisis communication plans: Poor predictors of excellent crisis public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 24(4), 461–475.
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of the mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36(2), 176–187.
- McGuire, C. (July 25, 2005). Assembling a crisis management toolkit. *PRWeek*, 8(29), 18.
- Michelson, G., & Mouly, S. (2000). Rumour and gossip in organizations: A conceptual study. *Management Decision*, 38(5), 339–46.
- Michelson, G., & Mouly, S. (2002). 'You didn't hear it from us but...': Towards an understanding of rumour and gossip in organisations. *Australian Journal of Management*, 27(Special Issue), 57-65.
- Mitroff, I. I. (1996). *Essential guide to managing corporate crisis: A step-by-step guide*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mitroff, I. I., Shrivastava, P., & Udwadia, W. A. (1987). Effective crisis management. *The Academy of Management Executive*, 1(3): 283–292.
- Mitroff, I. I. (2001). *Managing crises before they happen: What every executive and manager needs to know about crisis management*. New York: Amacom.
- Mitroff, I. I. (2003). *Crisis leadership: Planning for the unthinkable*. New York: Wiley.
- Mitroff, I. I., & Alpasian, M. C. (2003). Preparing for evil, *Harvard Business Review*, 81(4), 109–115.
- Ogrizek, M., & Guillery, J. (1999) *Communicating in crisis*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Olanrian, B. A., & Williams D. E. (2001). Anticipatory model of crisis management: A vigilant response to technology crises. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of public relations* (pp. 487–500). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Pan, Z., & Kosicki, G. M. (1993). Framing analysis: An approach to discourse. *Political communication* 10, 55–75.
- Patterson, B. (2004). A crisis media relations primer. *Public Relations Tactics*, 11(12), 13.
- Pauchant, T. C., & Mitroff, I. I. (1992). *Transforming the crisis-prone organization*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Pauchant, T. C., & Mitroff, I. I. (1988). Crisis prone versus crisis avoiding organisations: Is your company's culture its own worst enemy in creating crisis? *Industrial Crisis Quarterly*, 2(1), 53–63.
- Pearson, C. M., & Clair, J. A. (1998). Reframing crisis management. *Academy of Management Review*, 23(1), 59–77.
- Pines, W. L. (1985). How to handle a PR crisis: Do's and don'ts. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 30(2), 16–20.
- Quarantelli, E. L. (1988). Disaster crisis management: A summary of research findings. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25(4), 373–386.
- Scanlon, T. J. (1983) Canadian communication in crisis situations. In B. D. Singer (Ed.), *Communication in Canadian society*. Reading: Addison-Wesley.
- Seeger, M. W., Sellnow, T. L., & Ulmer, R. R. (1998). Communication, organization and crisis. In M. E. Roloff (Ed.), *Communication yearbook* (pp. 231–275). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Seeger, M. W., Sellnow, T. L., & Ulmer, R. R. (2001). Public relations and crisis communication. In R. L. Heath (Ed.) *Handbook of public relations* (pp. 155–165). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- Seymour, M. & Moore, S. (2000). *Effective crisis management: Worldwide principles and practice*. London: Cassell.
- Stephens, K. K., Malone, P. C., & Bailey, C. M. (2005). Communication with stakeholders during a crisis: evaluating message strategies. *Journal of Business Communication*, 42(4), 390–419.
- Sturges, D. L. (1994). Communication through crisis: A strategy for organizational survival. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 1(3), 297–317.
- Sweeny, K. (2003). Destination unknown: Travel PR pros navigate uncertainties in economy, world affairs. *Public Relations Tactics*, 10(4), 1–2.
- Wainwright, R. (2001, April 10). Ansett wing cracks cause travel chaos. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 1.
- Wilkins, L., & Patterson, P. (1987). Risk analysis and the construction of the news. *Journal of Communication*, 37(3), 80–92.
- Williams, D., & Olaniran, B. (1998). Expanding the crisis planning function: Introducing elements of risk communication to crisis. *Public Relations Review*, 24(3), 387–392.

Author's address for correspondence:

Mrs Gwyneth Howell
BB153 – School of Communication Arts
The University of Western Sydney
Australia
Ph: 61 2 98525465
Email: g.howell@uws.edu.au

Copyright statement:

The author retains copyright in this material, but has granted *PRism* a copyright license to permanently display the article online for free public viewing, and has granted the National Library of Australia a copyright licence to include *PRism* in the PANDORA Archive for permanent public access and online viewing. This copyright option does not grant readers the right to print, email, or otherwise reproduce the article, other than for whatever limited research or educational purposes are permitted in their country. Please contact the author if you require other uses.

APPENDIX A: Case Study Coding Framework

a) Basic information		
1	Item number	
2	Coder	
3	Newspaper name	
4	Date	
b) Article position		
5	Article section	
6	Page number	
7	Size of article	
c) Article theme – general descriptive category		
T	Trigger theme	
c) Paragraph theme – specific exclusive category		
E	Explanation theme	
B	Blame theme	
R ₁	Responsibility theme	
R ₂	Resolution theme	

Case Study Coding Framework: Explanation

Basic information

1 – Item number (code number and 3 digits)

Commentary: Identification number. Each article has been assigned an identification number from the population 001 to 269.

2 – Coder (coder – 2 digits)

Commentary: Identification number of coder. As there are multiple coders for analysis, each will be identified numerically: 01, 02, 03, etc....

3 – Newspaper name (2 digits)

The Australian 01

The Australian Financial Review 02

The Age 03

The Sydney Morning Herald 04

Commentary: Identification number of the newspaper.

4 – Date (4 digits)

Commentary: Identification of article by date. Day and month when the article was published; with number of days presented 01 through to 31 and number of months from 01 to 06.

News frame

5 – Article section (2 digits)

News/Local 01

Business/Finance 02

Aviation 03

Features 04

Editorial 05

Letter to the editor 06

Company/Markets 07

Sport 08

Computers 09

Commentary: Attempting to find a distinction between themes and location of article during each of the four stages of the life cycle.

6 – Page number (2 digits)

Commentary: Identify the perceived significance of the story by the newspaper during the four stages of the life cycle.

7 – Size of article

Small (Less than 350 words) 01

Medium (Between 351 and 750 words) 02

Large (Greater than 751 words) 03

Commentary: To measure the editorial importance given to the article, used to attract the reader's attention. All four newspapers are of roughly equal size so the defined size will be applicable across the data.

General Descriptive Category

Trigger theme T

Commentary: Each trigger theme will present in content as a brief synopsis or initial coverage of a specific issue or event that has the potential to progress to a crisis.

There are two clearly distinct types of articles: those with a focus on the Ansett Airlines' safety; and those with a different focus, where the reference to Ansett Airlines' safety appears in discussion. When the article focus is secondary on Trigger Theme coding, the information collected from the articles should focus on the section that talks specifically about Ansett Airlines 767 groundings. The focal

trigger theme selected due to frequency is the safety of Ansett Airlines. The following four themes will be analysed in terms of this theme.

Specific exclusive category – cause/effect relationships

Explanation theme E

Commentary: Explanation themes from mass media content of extensive discussions on the actual events of the crisis and the issues related to its occurrence. Often presented as chronological discussions of the crisis or event, the explanation theme presents various issues related to the crisis.

Blame theme B

Commentary: Blame themes typically present as individuals or the organisation attempts to assign blame for the crisis occurring, usually through making accusations in mass media.

Responsibility theme R₁

Commentary: Responsibility themes present as discussions of how the event occurred and who or what is responsible for its occurrence.

Resolution theme R₂

Commentary: Resolution theme discussions summarise how the crisis occurred, where blame was allocated; implications for the future can be drawn from the events.