

Crisis Communications and Media Coverage Before,
During, and After a Natural Disaster

A Senior Project

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By

Juliet Saunders

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Abstract

This study is aimed to further define the connection between crisis communications and the media. This is a single-site case study that was one of the most reported on natural disasters in the United States, Hurricane Katrina. The study will focus on determining the meaning of crisis communications, crisis communications plans and the medias' roles in natural disasters. Three experts in the field of Public Relations and Media were interviewed to gain insight into the working relationships between the media and crisis communicators. Before the study is able to determine the best practices for crisis communications, it must first look into the theories and current practices. Hurricane Katrina is examined in order to site the lessons media practitioners can learn in order to make crisis communications more efficient.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Every year the world is hit by numerous natural disasters. The public learns about these disasters through different media platforms. When a natural disaster hits-it is partially up to the media to alert the public with information as it becomes available. As Garfield suggests in her study, “mass media is the primary source of information during disasters, especially prior to, during the initial impact, and in the immediate aftermath,” (Garfield, 2007, p. 59).

Think back to 2005, the Gulf Coast of the United States is struck by the disastrous storm Hurricane Katrina. The country quickly shifts into crisis mode as thousands are left homeless and without adequate shelter. CNN’s Anderson Cooper becomes the face of the crisis as he reports from the eye of the storm in his characteristic emotional and relatable tones. The country is in a state of emergency.

How was the public notified about the disaster and why were so many people still left without help? The mysteries that surround the Hurricane and the thousands who were left without help-can be looked at in a few different ways; President Bush and FEMA’s turtle-like pace responding to the disaster and the media’s constant and active coverage of the disaster. In order to properly dissect the disaster and some of what happened-we must focus on one issue at a time.

This paper will be a single-site case study on Hurricane Katrina and the media’s coverage before, during and after the disaster.

Background of the Problem

Natural disaster can have extreme effects on all those involved. Hurricane Katrina is widely regarded as a media and public relations failure. In order to learn from this “failure” we must analyze the disaster through the lens of the media and public relations officials. In order to understand why the storm and the coverage and public relations responses are considered a failure, we must first understand the concept of crisis communications and crisis planning. “Hurricane Katrina represents one of the most severe natural disasters in U.S. history. It also represents one of the most poorly handled in terms of crisis communication,” (Ulmer et. al, 2015, p.175). We must also look into the roles the media should play during a crisis.

Purpose of the Study

This case study will look into the media’s role following a natural disaster. It will also look into what the medias roles are, and should be, before, during and after a natural disaster. This study will discuss Crisis Communications Plans for Public Relations Practitioners. It will also relate crisis communications plans explained by experts, to the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina.

Setting of the Study

This is a single case study that will use research from papers written on the media coverage, Public Relations Plans and informational interviews with Public Affairs Officers, Public Relations Executives and members of the media.

Research Questions

The study is based on research questions that were created from independent research conducted before the start of the paper. This study will focus on the following research questions:

1. What are the communications theories and what are the crisis management techniques applicable to the study?
2. What are the media's roles in planning and crisis communication?
3. What was the communication plan used by the members of the media and public relations officials and what were the affects on the amount of media coverage before, during and after Hurricane Katrina?
4. After the media coverage ended-what was the physical state of New Orleans?

Definition of Terms

Media: Newspapers, magazines, television and radio, considered as a group; the news media. (dictionary.cambridge.org).

Public Relations: Public Relations is the art and science of analyzing trends, practicing their consequences, counseling the organization leaders, and implementing planned programs of action, which will serve both the organizations' and the public interest. (Public Relations Writing, Form and Style. Newsom and Haynes, 4).

Public Information Officer: Public Information Officers are charged with gathering and disseminating information to stakeholders during a crisis. It is a complex communication job that is essential to an effective response and recovery

operation during a crisis. (Ulmer et. al, *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving From Crisis to Opportunity*, p. 61).

Crisis/Issues Management: Is primarily a research function, the purpose of which is to identify and track trends and events likely to affect the institution and any of its publics. (Newsom et. al, *Public Relations Writing: Form and Style*, p. 325).

Crisis Communications: According to *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving From Crisis to Opportunity*, Crisis Communications is the way in which a company or city responds to a crisis, and can include press releases, news conferences and the medium in which they communicate with their stakeholders. (Ulmer et. al, *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving From Crisis to Opportunity*, p. 6-8).

Crisis Communication Plan: (also known as crisis management plan); A crisis management plan (CMP) is a reference tool, not a blueprint. A CMP provides lists of key contact information, reminders of what typically should be done in a crisis, and forms to be used to document the crisis response. A CMP is not a step-by-step guide to how to manage a crisis. Lerbinger (2012), Coombs (2015), and Low, Chung and Pang (2012) have noted how a CMP saves time during a crisis by pre-assigning some tasks, pre-collecting some information, and serving as a reference source. Pre-assigning tasks presumes there is a designated crisis team. The team members should know what tasks and responsibilities they have during a crisis. (instituteforpr.prg, Crisis Management and Communications).

Natural Disasters/Hazards: Are naturally occurring physical phenomena caused either by rapid or slow onset events, which can be geophysical, hydrological,

climatological or biological. (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, ifrc.org).

Hurricane: Also referred to as tropical storms, cyclones and typhoons. A Hurricane is a non-frontal storm system that is characterized by a low-pressure center, spiral rain bands and strong winds. (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, ifrc.org).

FEMA: According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, FEMA is an abbreviation for the Federal Emergency Management Agency; A US Government organization that is part of the Department of Homeland Security and that organizes help for people when there is an emergency, such as a Natural Disaster. (Dictionary.cambridge.com).

Organization of the Study

The study will be divided into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the problem and overview of what methods and questions will be asked throughout the study. Chapter two is the literature review of the research questions and attempts to use current information and other studies to answer the research questions. Chapter three is the methodology in which the author uses to conduct the study and how the data was collected. Chapter four is the data analysis where the author will conduct interviews and begin to draw conclusions based on the research collected. The final chapter, chapter five is the discussion of conclusions and recommendations for further practice and/or study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

What are the Communication Theories and Crisis Management Techniques Applicable to the Study?

This study is grounded using the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, which according to Coombs (2012),

“Dictates that organizations must first protect their stakeholders by providing instructing information for physical coping and adjusting information for psychological coping. After an organization has secured stakeholders’ protection in these ways, it turns to mending its reputation through deny, diminish, rebuild, and/or reinforce strategies reflecting varying levels of accommodation,” (as cited in Liu & Pompper, 2012, p. xx).

According to W.T. Coombs situational crisis communication theory “is a clear example of theory that primarily focuses on organization-based concerns, actions, and outcomes.”

Mass Communication Theories have a great deal of importance when it comes to dealing with a natural disaster after the initial event. The theories will be the basis of how the public relations specialists deal with the media torrent that occurs after the crisis.

There are other theories the article mentions that lend their hand and abilities to crisis communications. Such as the complexity theory that lists seven “key constructs” for guidance through a crisis. 1. Interacting Agents. 2. Adaptability. 3. Self-Organization. 4. Instability. 5. Influence of History. 6. Permeable Boundaries.

And 7. Irreducibility. These steps could be a great asset in a crisis communication plan. (Gilpin & Murphy, 2010, Liu & Pompper, 2012).

A study titled, Best Practices as an Assessment for Crisis Communication featured in the Journal for Communication Management, talks about why a crisis Communications Plan is important.

“Plan for a prompt response: organizations can and should plan for the chaos inherent in crises. This practice at minimum requires identification of needed resources, recognition of potential hazards, and designation of responsibilities for team members. A crisis plan should include the who, what, where, and when of the response to provide the organization with easy-to-follow guidelines during the initial confusion of the crisis,” (Veil & Husted et. al, 2012, p. 133).

The study also suggests various ways to come up with a valid crisis communications plan, such as creating a communications network with the public and the media (Veil & Husted et. al, 2012, p. 134).

What are the Medias’ Roles In Planning Crisis Communications?

During the 9/11 crises in 2011, the information that the public sought the most was what caused the disaster, the threat level and level of damages among others (Ulmer, Sellnow et al, 2015, p.118).

A study found that those who might be directly affected by the crisis spent eight hours a day using media outlets, such as radio and television, the internet or reaching out to friends to find out more information about the crisis (Ulmer, Sellnow et al, 2015, p.118).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has done studies about the best practices for a crisis spokesperson during a crisis. They are as follows:

“(1) Simple messages are important during a crisis when people may have difficulty processing information. (2) Timely messages are critical during a crisis. (3) Accuracy requires straightforward messages. (4) Relevant messages address the most immediate concerns. (5) Credibility builds trust that is essential to effective crisis communication. Finally, (6) consistency is the hallmark of effective crisis communication,” (Ulmer, Sellnow et al, 2015, p. 149).

The B.P. Oil Spill, just like Hurricane Katrina and the 9/11 terrorists attacks attracted a great deal of media coverage.

“The global media’s attention for this crisis was intense. PIO’s suggested that the media was important to their communication because they were the primary way to get messages out to their stakeholders,” (Ulmer, Sellnow et al, 2015, p. 62).

The Public Information Officers suggest that perhaps the intensity in which the media covered this particular crisis made working with them harder. The media demanded more access to the spill coverage and often weren’t satisfied with the coverage they were getting. The study suggests that it made getting correct information to the public hard because the onslaught of media questions and attention made some information go out before it was checked (Ulmer, Sellnow et al, 2015, p. 62).

What was the Communication Plan Used by Members of the Media and Public Relations Officials and its Effect on the Amount of Media Coverage Before, During, and After Hurricane Katrina?

In an essay written two years after Hurricane Katrina, Communicating throughout Katrina-the authors suggest there are many people need to be involved in the plan in order to have a good communications plan and great media coverage.

“A typical scenario in this perspective would have key leaders interacting with a range of advisors, including police and fire chiefs, health and mental health experts, media consultants, technical specialists (terrorism experts, chemical specialists, etc.), and odiers,” (Garnett, Kouzman et. al, 2007).

This communication plan also tells those involved in the coverage of the natural disaster how to properly cover the disaster even down to the tone of the coverage. The essay also says that the media coverage and those involved such as President George Bush failed to meet these key components of proper media coverage during Hurricane Katrina (Garnett, Kouzman et. al, 2007.)

The book, Crisis Communication and Race, looks at the functions that crisis communications and disaster preparedness have for the public.

“The crisis message makes clear directions on the current state regarding the crises and what actions should now be taken,” (Spence, et. al, 2007, p. 541).

This book also suggests that even if a crisis preparedness plan is in theory effective, it is the public who makes the decision whether or not to follow the plan closely that has been laid out by the media. (Spence, et. al, 2007,p. 546).

When Hurricane Katrina Media Coverage Ended, What was the Physical State of New Orleans?

After a natural disaster there are many aspects that go into recovering a city, such as economic and social rebuilding. Hurricane Katrina, it is suggested, is a great, or rather poor example of what can happen to a city and its residents after a disaster as big as Katrina (Kim, et al., 2014, p. 666). It is not the responsibility of the residents, but the responsibility lies within the government and the various legal “stakeholders” within the city.

“The recovery process that takes place in the wake of severe damage to an area requires a holistic approach that entails addressing the immediate needs of victims, devising and communicating a new vision of the recovered community, planning an economic comeback, and rebuilding social networks among residents,” (NHRAIC 2001).

In an article that documents a first-hand account of a man who had family in New Orleans when the Hurricane struck, the author talks about the other forms of media he used to get his information. The author, Gary K. Perry, talks about how during the disaster the broadcast media outlets were often unable to get into the storm and many people turned to social media to stay updated on the disaster (Perry, 2012, p. 76). In his article, Perry talks to a public historian named Michael Mizell-Nelson who created the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank (HDMD). Which is an online space where survivors of Hurricane Katrina can share their stories. Perry suggests that the HDMD was able to fill a vacant space left by the “mainstream media” that failed in their coverage of the disaster (Perry, 2012, p.78).

“When you consider it, the mainstream media gravitates towards the extraordinary...things that grab peoples’ attention,” (Perry, 2012, p. 78). “The people who were in the thick-of-it were not in the national narrative.”

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter will discuss the methodology used to collect the data sources for this study. The data will be collected using resources found online through the Cal Poly Library portal and in-person interviews with experts in the field.

Data Sources

An expert from the following fields were interviewed with a questionnaire regarding the study; former Public Information Officer for the Central Coast of California, Dr. Dan Eller, the second interview was with Crisis Communications consulting firm owner, Scott Summerfield, and the third interview was with the Media Relations Manager for a hospital, Chris Saunders. The questionnaire was designed to gain perspective about the training and experience each member of the news community has regarding natural disasters and crisis communication. The range of interviewees was carefully selected to receive a wide range of perspectives, experience levels and knowledge for this study.

The university's library portal provides a vast array of resources that can be pinpointed through precise searches including keywords and years of study.

Participants

The participants in the study are industry experts with many years experience in the field of crisis communications and the media. Participants include: Dr. Dan Eller, Scott Summerfield and Chris Saunders. Dr. Dan Eller is the former Public Information Officer for the California State Parks for the Central Coast, and has over 25 years experience in the field of communications. He currently works as

a Public Relations professor at California State University, San Luis Obispo, and has published many studies regarding crisis communications. Scott Summerfield owns a consulting firm in Northern California, called SAE Communications, and has over 30 years experience in communications. The firm specializes in writing crisis communications plans for outside agencies, such as government agencies and big organizations. Chris Saunders is the Media Relations Manager for Palomar Health in San Diego, California. He has been in communications for over 35 years, and is also the former Public Information Officer for the San Diego Sheriffs Department.

Interview Design

The design of the questionnaire is meant to incorporate the main points of the study while being able to gain new perspectives about the focus of my study. It will center on the research questions listed in chapter one in order to provide a launching pad for information to be collected from real life practitioners of public relations and media. This will give way to new ideas and knowledge that would not be able to be gathered from online research alone.

Interview Questionnaire

This study used the following interview questions:

1. In your own words - what is a crisis?
2. Why is crisis communication important after a disaster?
3. In your own words - what is a crisis communication plan?
4. What kind of crisis communication plan does your (previous) employer have – and how often is it practiced, updated and used?
5. Why is a crisis communication plan important to have?

6. In your opinion – what are the medias’ roles regarding crisis communication after a disaster?
7. What are your opinions on the way the media typically handles crises in your city?
8. If you worked in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, what do you think you would have done differently and why?
9. Are there any lessons we can learn from Hurricane Katrina and the way the media handled the disaster?
10. What is the importance of communication before, during and after a disaster hits and why?
11. Anything else you would like add?

Data Collection

The methodology for data collection used in this study will be from three interviews conducted with professionals pertaining to the field for the study, Public Relations and Media Communications. The interviewees will be asked specially formulated questioners to garner as much information as possible pertaining to their area of expertise, including plans their companies or agencies have in place and prior experience regarding crisis communications and media coverage of crises. This will help shed light to the online information gathered.

Data Presentation

It is important that the interviews take place in a manner that allows for a completely un-biased approach to the subject matter. The interviews will take place in person or over the phone if their schedule does not allow. Prior to the interview

communication will mainly take place over the phone in order to confirm the interviews and find out information about their job-so research can be done in advance. This will allow time to come up with any questions missed in the questionnaire that will be vital to information needed to further the study. I will record the interviews done in person with a digital audio recorder, or an iPhone allowing the interviewer to give full attention. After the interview, the tapes will be used to transcribe the interviews, which will be listed in the appendix of this study.

Limitations

The Senior Project is limited by the amount of time allotted to complete the study. The course will take place over a 10-week period and other limitations include but are not limited to, time constraints and work overload.

Delimitations

As this senior project will take place after I walk in the Fall Commencement for 2015, and will be the only remaining course needed to complete my degree. I am limited to interviewing experts in my hometown of San Diego or over the phone. One interview will take place in person and two will take place over the phone and be recorded to ensure all information recorded in the appendices is verbatim.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Chapter four will discuss responses conducted in three interviews with professionals related to public relations and the media. Each interview lasted between 30-45 minutes and was recorded. Due to the length of the interviews, they will be paraphrased and organized by section below. Each answer from the interviews and the research from the research questions will be paraphrased due to the length of the interviews and the density of the research.

Description of Participating Experts in Related Fields

Public Relations - State Parks:

Dr. Dan Eller was a Public Information Officer for the California State Parks for almost 25 years. Part of Dan's duties was overseeing media and crisis communication for the California State Parks on the Central Coast of California. Dr. Eller has a background in Public Relations, Media and Crisis Communications. Currently he is a Public Relations Professor at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. He has also published several peer-reviewed Journal articles and been a co-author for a Public Relations textbook.

Public Relations – Crisis Communications/Consulting:

Scott Summerfield has been in media and media communications for over 30 years. He started out as a reporter and found his way into media relations and became the Public Information Officer for the City of Newark, California. From there, Scott founded SAE Communications located in the Bay Area of California, where he also serves as the companies' President. The company provides consulting and crisis

communications plans for companies and government organizations. SAE Communications has been in operation for over 23 years. He is also a course manager and communications teacher for California Specialized Training Institute.

Public Relations – Media Relations:

Chris Saunders has been in communications for over 35 years. He started out as a producer, before becoming a seasoned reporter for over 20 years. He moved on to become the Public Information Officer for the San Diego Sheriffs Department before becoming the Media Relations Manager for Palomar Health in San Marcos, California. In addition, Chris has also been an Adjunct Professor for the Governors Officer of Emergency Services for over 11 years.

Crisis Communication Questionnaire:

Each expert was asked to respond to questions regarding crisis communication and Hurricane Katrina:

1. In your own words-what is a crisis in terms of PR?

Question #1 was meant to adapt the conversation in a way that was relatable for each public relations expert. A crisis, or crises is a broad term that can relate to dozens of scenarios each employer may experience. Each crisis provides its own unique circumstances and challenges, making each response varied; so one broad definition cannot define the term.

- Dan Eller: “Usually when crisis happens it not only brings unwanted public attention but it can change the way business is done for a company or an organization or a public agency in the future”

(Appendix A).

- Scott Summerfield: “Crises take a couple of different forms. One is a natural disaster like hurricane Katrina or other events like that. And the other is what we call crises of confidence and that’s when a public agency or a company creates its own crisis through somebody doing something illegal, immoral, or unethical” (Appendix B).
- Chris Saunders: “I think a crisis occurs when there is an event involving your company or your organization that needs immediate attention to keep it from looking extremely negative to the public and the rest of the world that is effected by your organization” (Appendix C).

2. Why is crisis communication important after a disaster?

Question #2 is meant to determine why crisis is important after a crisis and what kind of communication is necessary. Based on the meaning of the term crisis communication defined in chapter two, we know that communication following a crisis is important, but the type of communication is pertinent to the recovery time of the company as well. It is important to gain different perspectives on the kind of communication.

- Dan Eller: “Well crisis communication after a disaster is critical, especially immediately after. As soon as possible, crisis communication should be incorporated...And then once it’s happened a response is critical. It’s really important that it be fast, accurate and be as transparent as it can be” (Appendix A).

- Scott Summerfield: “Well it’s not only after, its during as well... peoples emotions are very and people are very worried, good crisis communications helps people make the right decisions during these very emotional, very very tense and stressful times” (Appendix B).
- Chris Saunders: “It is extremely important to communicate to the public important information they need to know to prevent them from being injured or their property being damaged by a disaster” (Appendix C).

3. In your own words - what is a crisis communication plan?

Question #3 is meant to determine not only the importance of crisis communication after a crisis, as answered in question two, but also to determine what kind of preparation happens before a crisis that leads to great crisis communication before, during and after a crisis.

- Dan Eller: “Well a crisis communication plan is trying to do something that can be a little bit tricky and that is risk assessment. To begin with we want to define what a crisis is for a company... So in a company what we want to look at in terms of crisis communication planning is define what the crises can be for a company” (Appendix A).
- Scott Summerfield: “Crisis communications plan is a foundation for how a government agency or a private company should communicate when a crisis happens... It’s essential that a plan is in place that includes different procedures to communicate during a crisis, very clear staffing responsibilities, a clear understanding of how to get news to the local

media and regional media and often national and international media during a crisis” (Appendix B).

- Chris Saunders: “To me, it is very similar to the hospitals’ disaster plan, anticipating various types of disasters and how we will handle them ...So basically, you have to think of as many possible scenarios as you can, based on history and also a little out of the box thinking, with what could happen but haven’t happened yet” (Appendix C).

4. What kind of crisis communication plan does your (previous) employer have – and how often is it practiced, updated and used?

Question #4 is meant to explore the different kinds of communications plans used by the experts’ employers, so that we can see how crisis communications plans are used in practical and real life situations.

- Dan Eller: “Well we have some communication plans in place for Tsunami, Fire, Earthquake, those types of things are that are more likely to happen... Actually we practice quite a bit. Working with the County of San Luis Obispo office of Emergency Services, we practice, I would say throughout the year periodically” (Appendix A).
- Scott Summerfield: “Well we actually work with different companies and different government agencies to create their plans. So we have written a number of them. They are practiced fairly frequently, more commonly with these crises of confidence rather than natural disasters” (Appendix B).

- Chris Saunders: “My previous employer had an extremely detailed communications plan. Staging areas for the media, who would be speaking, how do we handle this type of emergency, how do we handle another type of situation?” (Appendix C).

5. Why is a crisis communication plan important to have?

Question #5 is meant to discuss further the importance of a crisis communication plan. So far we already know what a crisis communication plan is, according to the experts. We also know why they believe communication is important after a disaster occurs. Now we can explore why the professionals believe having a plan in place prior to a natural disaster or crisis of confidence is crucial.

- Dan Eller: “Well because the most important thing about having a crisis communication plan is usually when crisis happens, it can involve multiple agencies, multiple stakeholders or multiple companies, individuals, and not having a plan for your particular company or public agency is difficult to work with others” (Appendix A).
- Scott Summerfield: “It really is not optional. In fact, it is mandatory. Because at some point every company and every government agency is going to face some sort of crisis...And when they face that crisis they need to be able to act quickly to help people make good decisions and to maintain their credibility as they respond to their crisis. The only way to do that is to have a

plan in place and ready to go when the crisis hits. You absolutely cannot create one during the crisis itself” (Appendix B).

- Chris Saunders: “Well I think we have answered that question. You cannot go into any kind of crisis or incident without knowing how you are going to handle it in advance and that is why we plan these scenarios’ (Appendix C).

6. In your opinion – what are the medias’ roles regarding crisis communication after a disaster?

Question #6 is meant to explore how the media in each expert’s city handles crises and crises communication not only after but also before and during a crisis.

- Dan Eller: “I feel that the most important thing the media can do after a crisis has happened is 1, to report the news in a non-biased fashion... I believe it is very vital for the media to respond with the public not just to the public” (Appendix A).
- Scott Summerfield: “The media is the most efficient way that a company or a government agency can communicate with a large number of people... All of those traditional and social media channels added together helps a company or an agency get news to the largest number of people most quickly” (Appendix B).
- Chris Saunders: “The media realizes that it plays an important role in crisis situations, and they are very good about

understanding that role and getting the latest greatest information out. It is up to us to get the information to them and make sure that it is being transmitted to the public properly” (Appendix C).

7. What are your opinions on the way the media typically handles crises in your city?

Question #7 is meant to bring the scope of the media to the town or city each expert lives in. It is important for members of the media to distinguish how the media works on a national and on a local level.

- Dan Eller: “I think in, lets say, the City of San Luis Obispo in terms of local media handling crisis, I think that they are very quick to respond. Because for one thing, it’s a small town and it’s a small media market and there’s not as much competition with stories and incidents and things that are going on each day, and so they are able to commit pretty much full resources to it... I guess my only critique that might be negative is that I don’t think that the local media here really know quite as much as what goes into planning and participate in terms of what some of the things that are being done” (Appendix A).
- Scott Summerfield: “I find the media tends to be very very responsible during crises...That said, the media is only as good as the information that they are able to get. Which is why it truly is a

partnership between local agencies or companies and the media in helping people get the news that they need” (Appendix B).

- Chris Saunders: “In San Diego County I would say they get an A+. The media here does a wonderful job of understanding their role in communicating important information to the public, and they step up and do the job very well...In San Diego County I would say they get an A+. The media here does a wonderful job of understanding their role in communicating important information to the public, and they step up and do the job very well” (Appendix C).

8. If you worked in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, what do you think you would have done differently and why?

Question #8 is meant to bring the questionnaire back to the focus of the case study, Hurricane Katrina. It is important that the emphasis is on one event to understand it through the lens of an actual event, rather than pre-planning for a disaster.

- Dan Eller: “Katrina was poorly handled. I hate to say this, but there was a failure to communicate... if I had been working to deal with it, its tough because, working in communications there is a chain of command. And working for a public agency the top chain of command is Federal Government then State Government. And when the Federal Government couldn’t get it right then there are

communication breakdowns that will occur throughout”
(Appendix A).

- Scott Summerfield: “Hurricane Katrina was a major fail on a number of fronts. There was very poor communication with the public... I would have had a much better plan beforehand. I would have made sure that elected officials, including the mayor, were part of that plan... I would have made sure that the plan included coordination in getting mutual aid and assistance from other agencies was part of that plan as well” (Appendix B).
 - Chris Saunders: “Well that’s hard for me to answer because I don’t know exactly what they did down there but I know it was rather chaotic. So my question to them post Katrina, ‘did you have an effective crisis communications plan along with all your other disaster plans, and did you implement it properly?... So I think that if they were not doing those things, if I were at Katrina at the time, I would have had a communications plan in effect and I would have utilized it” (Appendix C).
9. Are there any lessons we can learn from Hurricane Katrina and the way the media handled the disaster?

Question #9 is meant to discuss the lessons that can be learned from all natural disasters. Seeing as Hurricane Katrina is one of the major lessons in Crisis Communications planning in Public Relations Books, the experts

can now dispense the lessons they may have learned through watching the hurricane from an outsiders' perspective.

- Dan Eller: "... I think one of the most critical challenges learned is that of public communications. What can be done in a unified management in terms of communications? Command and control and how that's handled, because that was not handled during Katrina" (Appendix A).
- Scott Summerfield: "You know I feel the media did the best job they could. I don't know that there was anything more they could do... you always learn from it. You learn who your sources are, you learn who you can go to... I am pretty sure the local media there made very clear what they need the next time something like that happens" (Appendix B).
- Chris Saunders: "...the media handled it the best they could, it was a chaotic situation. One thing that is critical in a situation like that is setting up what is called a Joint Information Center, a J-I-C. And that's one of the thing that we teach at CSTI, California Specialized Training Institute, a JIC is where you bring together spokespeople for various agencies involved so everybody that is there will be able to inform the media about what is going on" (Appendix C).

10. What is the importance of communication before, during and after a disaster hits and why?

Question #10 is meant to discuss the importance of communication before and during a disaster. We have already discussed why it is important to communicate after a disaster, but the communication should be ongoing.

- Dan Eller: “Well I’d say before what is really critical, and this is the most critical thing if you are a public information officer, is to establish close relationships with your local media folks beforehand. (During) First and foremost thing is that the information follows a chain of command. That the person at the top is being aware of what is being said in terms of content, how it is being delivered in terms of timing, who is delivering it and then what is the follow up on that...The public needs to know immediately what is going on. But you are the one telling them. Not the media, they are simply a conduit. (After) Now in terms of post crisis, post-crisis is to debrief internally... You tell them what you are going to say. You say it. And then you tell them what you said” (Appendix A).
- Scott Summerfield: “...the media as a partner can help people make those good decisions ...It is one of the most critical pieces of any type of disaster response, so it is absolutely essential” (Appendix B).
- Chris Saunders: “...if a storm is coming, if a hurricane is coming, you’ll have several days of advanced warning usually. So it is all-

important to communicate to the public, that it's coming and if they need to evacuate... So the advanced communication is all-important... during the event, we are giving out information that enables people to survive whatever the event it...Afterwards, assuming that the emergency is over, it's very very important to basically let the public know what the lessons learned were” (Appendix C).

11. Anything else you would like to add?

Question #11 is meant to allow the experts to touch on anything important they wanted to speak about but was not able to fit into one of their answers.

- Dan Eller: “The final thing I would like to say is, is that, I really value my media relations and working with the media. I value them because I know at some point there will be a crisis and I know that the conduit they provide to the public is critical... Also in closing I would like to say that from a standpoint of being in public relations and relationship management, I have actually seen some good things come out of crisis” (Appendix A).
- Scott Summerfield: “I think, we are seeing a lot of government agencies and companies recognizing that they need to have a crisis communications plan in place. That is very gratifying to see...People are consuming information in new ways. It is very immediate, we don't have time to think, or to plan, or to ponder these things. Our response has to be virtually immediate. And a crisis communications

plan, a good well thought out crisis communications plan, allows you to do that” (Appendix B).

- Chris Saunders: “I see every crisis as an opportunity for you to make your organization look good. Now we are not saying that we are trying to put lipstick on a tragedy, so to speak. But if we demonstrate that we are prepared and we are handling it in the best possible way and learning lessons from things that did not go so well, then that builds trust in our organization. People will tend to trust us more and believe in us more, it enhances our credibility and reputation. So every situation, no matter how bad it appears, is an opportunity to show the public that you take their concerns seriously, that you are going to learn and grow from the situation” (Appendix C).

Crisis Communications Research Questions

For this study, four research questions were developed to gather information on Hurricane Katrina. Crisis Communications theories are discussed, media roles and the scope of the paper is then narrowed to focus on a single study, Hurricane Katrina. This is so we can better understand the theories we focus on, from a real life and practical application.

Research Question Number 1: What are the Communications Theories and Crisis Management Techniques that are Applicable to the Study?

- According to W.T. Coombs situational crisis communication theory “is a clear example of theory that primarily focuses on organization-based concerns, actions, and outcomes” (Liu & Pompper, 2012, p. xx).

Research Question Number 2: What are the Medias' Roles in planning and Crisis Communications?

- “(1) Simple messages are important during a crisis when people may have difficulty processing information. (2) Timely messages are critical during a crisis. (3) Accuracy requires straightforward messages. (4) Relevant messages address the most immediate concerns. (5) Credibility builds trust that is essential to effective crisis communication. Finally, (6) consistency is the hallmark of effective crisis communication” (Ulmer, Sellnow et al, 2015, p. 149).
- The global media’s attention for this crisis was intense. Public Information Officers suggested that the media was important to their communication because they were the primary way to get messages out to their stakeholders” (Ulmer, Sellnow et al, 2015, p. 62.)

Research Question Number Three: What was the Communication plan used by members of the media and public relations officials and its effect on the amount of media coverage before, during, and after Katrina?

- A typical scenario in this perspective would have key leaders interacting with a range of advisors, including police and fire chiefs, health and mental health experts, media consultants, technical specialists (terrorism experts, chemical specialists, etc.), and others” (Garnett, Kouzman et. al, 2007).
- “The crisis message makes clear directions on the current state regarding the crises and what actions should now be taken” (Spence, et. al, 2007, p. 541).

Research Question Number Four: When Hurricane Katrina Media Coverage Ended, What was the Physical State of New Orleans After?

- “The recovery process that takes place in the wake of severe damage to an area requires a holistic approach that entails addressing the immediate needs of victims, devising and communicating a new vision of the recovered community, planning an economic comeback, and rebuilding social networks among residents” (NHRAIC 2001).

Chapter 5

Discussions and Recommendations

Summary

This study was conducted in order to determine better crisis communication practices during crises. The scope of the study was narrowed to research natural disasters, and took one of the most buzzed about natural disasters, Hurricane Katrina which happened in 2005. Crisis Communications is essential to media reporting during natural disasters, and in order to learn more about three experts were interviewed to gather more information.

To find out more information on crisis communications three experts in the field of public relations and the media were interviewed. They were asked to answer the following questions:

1. In your own words - what is a crisis in terms of PR?
2. Why is crisis communication important after a disaster?
3. In your own words - what is a crisis communication plan?
4. What kind of crisis communication plan does your (previous) employer have – and how often is it practiced, updated and used?
5. Why is a crisis communication plan important to have?
6. In your opinion – what are the medias' roles regarding crisis communication after a disaster?
7. What are your opinions on the way the media typically handles crises in your city?

8. If you worked in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, what do you think you would have done differently and why?
9. Are there any lessons we can learn from Hurricane Katrina and the way the media handled the disaster?
10. What is the importance of communication before, during and after a disaster hits and why?
11. Anything else you would like to add?

Each question was changed slightly to cater to each respondent based on his or her fields. The interview questionnaire was designed to gather information from each respondent that related to the literature review.

Discussion and Recommendations for Practice

Responses from each expert in chapter four are used to compare research findings from chapter two, the literature review. There can be similarities found between the research and the experts' responses.

Research question #1: What are the Communication Theories and Crisis Management Techniques Applicable to the Study?

The interview questions relied heavily on crisis communications plans and the definition of crises, particularly natural disasters. All three respondents maintained there are two kinds of crises, natural disasters and crisis of confidence. Each respondent highlighted the importance of crisis communications plans to deal with the after effects of crises. Dr. Eller states that a crisis communications plan is critical for a company, using risk assessment as an example for how to create aspects of one. Scott Summerfield adds that crisis communications plans are

essential during a disaster. Chris Saunders explained that speaking to the public's concerns is the most important part of crisis communications.

The literature review sums up the ideas the respondents had, the article Best Practices as an Assessment for Crisis Communications states, in relation to a crisis communication plan; "organizations can and should plan for the chaos inherent in crises" (Veil & Husted et. al, 2012, p. 133). This article also states the idea that the public's concerns are also your concerns when dealing with crisis communications.

From the similarities we can draw from the respondents' answers and the research, we can conclude crisis communications plans are of the utmost importance, and should look at all aspects of the plan including, risk assessment, and communications with the public and addressing their concerns during a crisis.

Research question #2: What are the Media's Roles in Planning Crisis Communications?

Each respondent highlighted the importance of the media before, during and after a disaster, but each respondent also emphasized different aspects of the media's importance as well. Dr. Eller spoke first of the importance of the media reporting in a non-biased way, he then said one of the most important parts of the media is the relationship that you, as a government agency has with the media. He also talked about the importance of the relationship the media has with Public Information Officers, saying that it is his story to tell, and getting his story out efficiently is crucial, because somebody might tell it first, and it could be wrong. Scott Summerfield reiterated the importance the government agency or company has with the media. He also highlighted the idea that the way the public receives

information is ever-changing so the media must keep up with these trends, but that local television news is still the most effective way to communicate during a disaster. Chris Saunders emphasized that the media must make sure the correct information is getting to the public.

The literature backed up Summerfield's idea that the channel of media is important to the public. A study found that those who might be directly affected by the crisis spent eight hours a day using media outlets, such as radio and television, the internet or reaching out to friends to find out more information about the crisis (Ulmer, Sellnow et al, 2015, p.118). Dr. Eller backs this idea up and argues that PIO's are crucial to the medias' roles during a crisis. The literature also shows that it is hard, but vastly important to get correct information out after a disaster, such as this finding related to the B.P. Oil Spill: The media demanded more access to the spill coverage and often weren't satisfied with the coverage they were getting. The study suggests that it made getting correct information to the public hard because the onslaught of media questions and in-attention made some information go out before it was checked (Ulmer, Sellnow et al, 2015, p. 62).

From these similarities, we can conclude that the medias' role in a natural disaster are crucial, and without this channel, government agencies would not be able to get their information out in a fast, efficient and effective manner.

Research Question #3: What was the Communication Plan Used by Members of the Media and Public Relations Officials and its' Effect on the Amount of Media Coverage Before, During and After Hurricane Katrina?

While there may not be a way to determine the exact communications plan in effect during Hurricane Katrina, we can take the lessons we learned from Hurricane Katrina to evaluate how to improve crisis communications. Dr. Eller and Scott Summerfield both cited Hurricane Katrina as a disaster on many fronts. Chris Saunders and Summerfield both stated that the media handled the crisis as best they could. All three agreed the main idea that would have helped the communications during Katrina, was to have a well thought out crisis communications plan. They all also agreed that lessons were learned from Katrina about crisis communications, and have been used since. All three agreed that communication to the media, and from the media to the public is absolutely critical *during* a disaster.

The research also shows us what the respondents were saying, a communications plan would have helped the media, the government and the state of New Orleans handle the disaster a little better. The essay, *Communicating Throughout Katrina*, suggests a plan to lay out a better communications plan. "A typical scenario in this perspective would have key leaders interacting with a range of advisors, including police and fire chiefs, health and mental health experts, media consultants, technical specialists'" (Garnett, Kouzman et. al, 2007). It goes on to say that President George W. Bush failed to meet all key components during that

disaster that would have led to better communications (Garnett, Kouzman et. al, 2007).

From the research and the respondent's answers, we can conclude that although Hurricane Katrina was a textbook example of a failure on many fronts of communication, the lessons that we can learn from the disaster are invaluable.

Research question #4: When Hurricane Katrina Ended, What was the Physical State of New Orleans?

New Orleans no longer appears in the news on a daily basis, as is expected after a disaster hits. It is in the media until the public no longer wants to see it. Now, wondering whether it is the medias responsibility to continue to report on the state of disaster areas years after the disaster is a topic for another study. We may be able to take the lessons learned from the disaster to strengthen the way the media communicates during a disaster. Dr. Eller states that the media is important for a crisis because they are the channels you tell your story through. Scott Summerfield highlighted the use of the more popular media channels, such as twitter or Facebook. Things that may not have been around or as popular back then, you use what will get your messages out there the fastest and to the widest audience. Chris Saunders reiterated the importance of briefing the media on the correct information before it reaches the public. All respondents agreed that crisis could bring about opportunity. There are opportunities to grow, and to make the organizations and the media communications better.

The research shows us that the media likes to latch onto sensational stories, and backs up the idea that it is important to make sure the media is receiving the correct information.

When you consider it, the mainstream media gravitates towards the extraordinary...things that grab peoples' attention" (Perry, 2012, p. 78).

The idea that we know the state of New Orleans is confusing. The respondents each did not touch on the importance of communication with the public after a disaster. Which may point to another lesson the media could learn, the idea that communication after a disaster, with the public could be just as important as during, and before.

Study Conclusion

In conclusion, the media is an ever-changing medium. In 2005 when Hurricane Katrina hit, the ways to communicate with and reach the public is vastly different than the channels media uses today to communicate. Two separate media practices, Public Relations and Media are brought together by the idea of crisis communications. The scope of crisis communications was narrowed to study Hurricane Katrina. The Public Information Officers and the agencies needed to communicate during the crisis, failed on their part and the media did the best they could to deliver the important messages to the public. It is crucial for media members and public relations practitioners to communicate with each other in order to make a natural disaster, just a little easier to navigate. It is essential that the public relations practitioners lay out a solid and all-encompassing crisis communications plan. It is also necessary for them to include the media in their

plans, make contacts and learn how to communicate with media members in order to get their messages to public in a clear and efficient manner. As the media is every changing, lessons have been learned from previous disasters and will continue to be learned in order to make crisis communications more proficient.

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Appendix A

Interview Transcripts: Dan Eller

The following interview was conducted to get an expert opinion on media coverage before, during and after a natural disaster and crisis communication practices.

Interviewer: Juliet Saunders

Respondent: Public Information Officer with California State Parks, Dr. Dan Eller.

Spent 25 years working in crisis communications for California State Parks.

Date of Interview: 8/11/16

Interview Transcription:

Juliet Saunders: "In your own words, what is a crisis?"

Dan Eller: "Well, in my own words what is a crisis? It's beyond being a problem for a company or in my case in a public agency. A problem is when something happens that can take some time but is usually quickly resolved. It's something that may affect the company or the agency but not disrupt its operation. A crisis is different than that. A crisis actually takes time to deal with. It can take actually sometimes considerable time to go through to the recovery period of a crisis. It may greatly affect the organizations reputation. Usually when crisis happens it not only brings unwanted public attention but it can change the way business is done for a company or an organization or a public agency in the future. Sometimes after a crisis, normal operating procedures are never done again. It can affect the brand it can affect how the public perceives a company or an organization."

JS: "Why do you think crisis communication is important after a disaster?"

DE: "Well crisis communication after a disaster is critical, especially immediately after. As soon as possible, crisis communication should be incorporated. But to back up - a crisis communication plan before a crisis, can help an organization in their efforts to communicate. Here would be an example: Every airline company already right now - they have a dark website. The dark website is for a plane that crashed. They have all the information except other than plugging in the airlines name and flight number and specifics into that website. They have press releases ready to go - they just need to incorporate the materials, the specifics into it. So, often we are doing crisis communication planning way before anything happens. And then once it's happened a response is critical. It's really important that it be fast, accurate and be as transparent as it can be. And in a major crisis, it should be delivered by the top person. Typically we don't just march out the person in charge for any little announcement because that kind of dilutes the importance of the message coming from the top person. We save that for things like this, a crisis. We want the president to come out and speak. And I think it's really important to allow follow up by the public, by the media and to allow access where there is a two way symmetrical

communication process with our publics and with the media so people can get the information they need immediately. That's my answer."

JS: "In your own words – what is a crisis communication plan?"

DE: "Well a crisis communication plan is trying to do something that can be a little bit tricky and that is risk assessment. To begin with we want to define what a crisis is for a company. And what I mean by that is trying to define the difference between problems and crisis. Here would be an example: The boss gets arrested for driving under the influence with no injuries or fatalities after leaving the company party or a company event. That is a problem. It is not going to completely disrupt the brand or how the company operates. You'll get through it. A crisis would be the president of the company has been embezzling a large amount of money or was arrested for insider stock trading - that is a crisis. So in a company what we want to look at in terms of crisis communication planning is define what the crises can be for a company. This is really critical: list the organization key stakeholders. Who are the key people that you need to speak to? In the case of the president embezzling the money it would be the board of directors, immediately; media, immediately; shareholders, immediately. Those are all key stakeholders. Another key component in planning is to identify the very threads under which an organization operates. I mean that is one way we can look at defining what crisis is. If I am doing communications for a mining operation, obviously there is a lot of risk in mining. Especially let's say miners that are going into an underground mine, well some of the obvious threats are that the mine could collapse and people could be trapped, dead and whatever the situation is. But I could be doing offshore oil drilling, well obviously there is a threat of a leak or failure of some capacity or there is a spill in the water. Also developing a plan means developing communication strategies for identified risks. Sometimes we'll speak differently to different types of risks. And we may have additional different stakeholders in terms of risk. If it's an environmental crisis we might let's say be speaking in terms of environmental issues with specific environmental publics. Here is another big thing we don't think about, where are you going to deliver – you need to plan for this – where are you going to deliver the communications ahead of times. You need to have an emergency operations center. Now here would be one example: I was called out on a Tsunami incident exercise with the county of San Luis Obispo. I was dispatched and told to drive immediately from San Simeon to the (Joy) information compound on Campus Avenue in San Luis Obispo. I drove over to Paso Robles I went down the Cuesta grade and up (highway) 1 to the information center. My superintendent was really upset with me because I was that late. In fact he was pretty mad. Until I explained to him that if you take the inundation maps that we have from the county of Tsunamis, and you look at the Tsunami inundation levels and if Via Creek on Highway 1 is completely underwater – there would be no way in real time – and I was asked that this be a real time incident- to do exactly what I would do in case of a Tsunami actually hitting. Well I am not going to drive south on highway 1 through Via Creek, it doesn't exist, and it's underwater. And so when I did that, the team realized that it is a great part in our plan here for when we do communicate, is allowing time for people to get from the

North Coast down into San Luis Obispo. So those are some of the things you might to look at as a plan.”

JS: “So...what kind of crisis communication plans does your current or previous employers have?”

DE: “Well we have some communication plans in place for Tsunami, Fire, Earthquake, those types of things are that are more likely to happen. Now in our campgrounds, which is like a little city, if you will, or a little town, where people are transient in nature, living, we have things like active shooter. Violence to others, based on issues like robbery, theft issues, violence, domestic issues. We have a number of different plans put in place there. But the larger scope would be flood, fire, earthquake and those types of natural disasters.”

JS: “How often are they practiced updated and used?”

DE: “Actually we practice quite a bit. Working with the County of San Luis Obispo office of Emergency Services, we practice, I would say throughout the year periodically. Most of the people involved in crisis communications and crisis planning have various levels of crisis training. I was trained at the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (CSTI) Training. And I hold certain certifications in crisis and the media communications, advanced crisis and media communications. I have been trained by the Federal Bureau of Investigations in officer-involved shooting and the media communications, which I was involved with in a double homicide down in Morro Bay. So we do a lot of planning and training. Training with the nuclear regulatory agency with Diablo (Canyon). Several different required training with them with the NRC (National Regulatory Commission). A lot.”

JS: “Why is a crisis communication plan important to have?”

DE: “Well because the most important thing about having a crisis communication plan is usually when crisis happens, it can involve multiple agencies, multiple stakeholders or multiple companies, individuals, and not having a plan for your particular company or public agency is difficult to work with others. And is a very fast moving environment if you don’t have a plan in place.”

JS: “In your opinion – what are the medias’ roles regarding crisis communication after a disaster?”

DE: “I feel that the most important thing the media can do after a crisis has happened is 1, to report the news in a non-biased fashion. Working with the media is something that personally, with our agency we do throughout the year, so those contacts are established. The media should continue to work with their point of contacts, their public information officers, the people that they are normally working with to get accurate information. I believe it is very vital for the media to respond with the public not just to the public. The old traditional model is for the

media to investigate and report. Now it is more having a dialogue with the public, especially with social media. Where the media can be providing updated information quickly, accurately and talking with the public, but really being careful with their sources. As we saw with the bombing incident three years ago in Boston, at the Boston Marathon. Of 100 news reports put out right after the incident, only two were correct. There is a lot of misinformation, news agencies trying to compete and have a lead in the story. I think it is better if news agencies work together and collaborate in terms of crisis, knowing that maybe trying to win the story, and lead the story, may not be and shouldn't be the most important thing. The most important is safety."

JS: "What are your opinions on the way the media typically handles crises in your city?"

DE: "I think in, lets say, the City of San Luis Obispo in terms of local media handling crisis, I think that they are very quick to respond. Because for one thing, it's a small town and it's a small media market and there's not as much competition with stories and incidents and things that are going on each day, and so they are able to commit pretty much full resources to it. I'd say that most of the media people here know most of the local communications people, they know whom to contact in situations. I think they try to be very accurate and honest in their reporting. I guess my only critique that might be negative is that I don't think that the local media here really know quite as much as what goes into planning and participate in terms of what some of the things that are being done. Most of the time things in terms of crisis are reported to people. Maybe not as much in terms of what companies and organizations and agencies are doing each day, to hopefully deal with a problem that comes up. I would say one example of where they did a good job with that recently is the county had a drill last year for the possible train derailment with oil tankers, and that was well reported. But it was reported because it is a political issue. It was reported because right now there are so many people up in arms about oil trains coming through San Luis Obispo. So I think the media is still quick to report stuff that's going to get a rise out of people. I don't think that's the best thing for public safety. I think that some of stories that aren't told in the county, well one would be Camp San Luis Obispo. It's the home of the California National Guard. I don't think people realize that the guard is a lot more than just weekend warriors. They are the number one public safety agency in the state. The Governor dispatches the guard when police and fire call 911. When police and fire can't handle a problem because it is overwhelming, they call the California National Guard. That is not a story that has been told, and its one that should be told. So I think they are slow in telling stories about all the things each day that people are doing in terms of public safety and crisis for the residents of San Luis Obispo County."

JS: "If you worked in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, what do you think you would have done differently and why?"

DE: "Well if I had worked in communications in New Orleans during Katrina it would have been tough. How can I say this-to begin with-the crisis Katrina was poorly handled. I hate to say this, but there was a failure to communicate. And this is a case study that is in most Public Relations books today, so this is not a political statement, I am not looking at who was in charge of politics at that time. But the White House and I can cite US News & World Report, cites that Katrina was a failure in terms of White House Communications. As I said many of the communication books today uses Katrina as an example of a failure to communicate. And the information flow during and post Katrina hurricane was really bad, and some of that has to do with politics. So if I had been working to deal with it, its tough because, working in communications there is a chain of command. And working for a public agency the top chain of command is Federal Government then State Government. And when the Federal Government couldn't get it right then there are communication breakdowns that will occur throughout. And it happened. Here is an example: the sheriff's office in Jefferson Parish, that was one of the main areas, was crippled in their communication efforts. The New Orleans police department was pretty much largely inoperative for three days following the hurricane. These are all parts of case studies today in what not to do in crisis communication. And Katrina is one of the great examples of the failure of the federal government to act in crisis."

JS: "Are there any lessons we can learn from Hurricane Katrina and the way the media handled the disaster?"

DE: "Yeah there are some big lessons that we can learn in terms of disaster and in terms of communication. And of course FEMA - the Federal Emergency Management Administration is doing more to have more of a centralized approach to communications. This includes incorporating all agencies and having more of a strategic systematic approach to communications where people are informed of what is going on at the time-as much as is known at the time. And that are orchestrated in their communications in a strategic collaborative fashion. With a chain of command, which works, to incorporate all folks when they are not working independently, not misinformed, and either not acting or not acting appropriately. I guess some other lessons that were learned from Katrina are looking at our national preparedness. These are critical challenges too-I realize that. But by looking at our national preparedness, our integration and use of military capabilities, our communications, the logistics of crisis in terms of things like search and rescue, public safety, public health, mass care and housing, and training exercises and things like that. But I think one of the most critical challenges learned is that of public communications. What can be done in a unified management in terms of communications? Command and control and how that's handled, because that was not handled during Katrina. There was no command and control. It was not handled correctly. For one thing, the planning in terms of knowledge and practice need to be sufficient. And that can be done now through FEMA's planning and coordination capabilities in terms of training and how to handle communications. One thing too that made it tough is that communications to the region was really difficult, I mean we take for granted that we are going to get the news from our TV, our Computer,

Radio, Cell Phone...all of those things were lost in Katrina. Because for one thing you can't power up those devices after about a day. Those things are totally useless. And there were other things that then usually go unused, but civilian cache radios like hand radio operators, those now are used in counties like in the San Luis Obispo county office of emergency services over on Kansas, they have a hand radio operation there. That can operate when every thing else goes down. AM radio specifically in cars, can be a lot of times where people can get information. That wasn't used in Katrina. And so we are looking at ways that we are still going to be able to logistically connect with people when their cell phone has been dead for a day or two. Their computer is dead, their TV is dead, everything is down and sometimes in a power outage you get a little mini wake-up call on how things can go down quickly. And that is one reason why I always keep all of my stuff really charged, is because there is a crisis today because I will be really quickly burning daylight on my ability to communicate. At the (Hearst) Castle that happened to me in the Earthquake. I couldn't put out a press release, Sacramento had to, and we had no electricity. I couldn't fire up my computer. So those are some of the things that are really critical challenges."

JS: "What is the importance of communication before, during and after a disaster hits and why?"

DE: "Well I'd say before what is really critical, and this is the most critical thing if you are a public information officer, is to establish close relationships with your local media folks beforehand. You don't want to meet people for the first time in a crisis. That is not a good look. You want to be able to have people know who you are ahead of time because see what you are working off in a crisis? Credibility. That is the number one thing you have. And if your credibility is lost, see to me, I never speculate. To me speculation is lying, because you don't know for sure, it's a speculation. See the media will speculate from the beginning on and they don't care if they are wrong, because they want to get a story out. That is no how we operate in public information. We only say what we know to the best of our knowledge in that moment of time. Now could we be "quote" wrong? It's not a perfect world. But we try to know the people who we are working with and have the information at hand that we can back up at that moment as being 100 percent accurate. Or we are not going to say anything at all. And sometimes the only response that I can make is "we are aware of the problem and we are working on it, we'll get back to you in the next hour with more information in a news conference". I am not going to get backed into the wall trying to speculate. And reporters want information now because they want to get a story out, so they will find a person to talk, and its not going to be me. So that is planning, is thinking about all those issues. And you have to think about that as a public information officer. You are trained on that. Now next is during the incident was the second part of your question?"

JS: "Yes."

DE: "First and foremost thing is that the information follows a chain of command. That the person at the top is being aware of what is being said in terms of content, how it is being delivered in terms of timing, who is delivering it and then what is the follow up on that; meaning new information coming in or questions that are being asked. In terms of delivering a response even if you have zero facts, that is why I said I might say, "we are aware of the problem, we are working on it, we will get back within the hour with a news conference," you need to respond immediately. Because if you don't tell your story, guess who is going to tell your story, the media. And God forbid they tell your story without you telling it. You want to frame a story, you want to own a story. And I will tell my story; they aren't going to tell it. They are simply a conduit for me. That story belongs to me; I am speaking on behalf of my agency, so that is critical when it is a true crisis, where lives can be lost or are lost, or lives are in jeopardy and public safety is in jeopardy. The public needs to know immediately what is going on. But you are the one telling them. Not the media, they are simply a conduit.

Now in terms of post crisis, post-crisis is to debrief internally. But then once again externally communicate to the media and to the public. Because it is important that people to know what happened, once again. You tell them what you are going to say. You say it. And then you tell them what you said. And back in crisis you let people know basically what happened, how it was dealt with, what you plan to do in the future and you look for public input. You want people to be able to communicate back with a flow of information back to the agency or to the company. You want to hear from people. You don't just want to make it go away. Because you see crisis brings opportunity. That is what a lot of people don't understand. Crisis can be a good thing; because, maybe yeah maybe you were doing something wrong as a company, and like I said it is not a perfect world, if you own up to that in the very beginning the American public is very understanding, if you try to hide it, they can turn on you in a dime. But by the same token it may allow your company or organization now a way to see that, yes there needs to be improvement, we are taking actions to improve it and we are going to be better because of it. It's like in our own lives, sometimes when things go wrong, we become stronger because of it because we learn what not to do in the future."

JS: "Is there anything else you would like add?"

DE: "The final thing I would like to say is, is that, I really value my media relations and working with the media. I value them because I know at some point there will be a crisis and I know that the conduit they provide to the public is critical. People are looking for information. So with that I try my best to always establish a professional working relationship with my local media members. Local media is the most important media out there. I think people a lot of times people think, "well if I can the big story with the big people, the big media markets, its good for me," it could be. But always, local media is the most important. Stories that have local interest are important to people. And when it is a crisis, boy is that the case because it is very local. It's immediate to the people that you are working with each day in your community. Also in closing I would like to say that from a standpoint of being

in public relations and relationship management, I have actually seen some good things come out of crisis. They created a work, and at times I really had to flex and be open to exploring different things, and talking about different things internally within the organization, but I saw some good things come out of crisis that really in the long run helped. So don't just go into a crisis thinking this is the end, it can be the beginning."

Appendix B

Interview Transcript: Scott Summerfield

The following interview was conducted to get an expert opinion on crisis communications and natural disaster, and media coverage before, during and after the crisis.

Interviewer: Juliet Saunders

Respondent: Owner or SAE Communication, Scott Summerfield

Date of Interview: 8/14/16

Interview Transcription:

Juliet Saunders: "In your own words – what is a crisis?"

Scott Summerfield: "Crisis communications or a crisis affecting the public agency is really the most; I would say vital opportunity to help people make good decisions during very difficult times. Crises take a couple of different forms. One is a natural disaster like hurricane Katrina or other events like that. And the other is what we call crises of confidence and that's when a public agency or a company creates its own crisis through somebody doing something illegal, immoral, or unethical. And that could be embezzlement, it could be workplace violence, it could be any number of things. There are a variety of types of crises that can really affect how you serve the public if you are a public agency."

JS: "Okay, so why do you think crisis communication is important after a disaster?"

SS: "Well it's not only after, its during as well. If it's a major natural disaster like a flood or fire or hurricane or something like that, people are very worried. Often their lives are threatened or their property is threatened, or their loved ones or friends are threatened in some way. And peoples emotions are very and people are very worried, good crisis communications helps people make the right decisions during these very emotional, very very tense and stressful times. People are often consumed with protecting themselves, protecting their property, and often just doing one or two things differently can make the difference between literally life and death. And good crisis communications helps people make those smart decisions."

JS: "And in your own words what is a crisis communications plan?"

SS: "Crisis communications plan is a foundation for how a government agency or a private company should communicate when a crisis happens. Very quickly things can spiral out of control in terms of how much media interest there is and contact from the public, social media posts, that sort of thing. It's essential that a plan is in

place that includes different procedures to communicate during a crisis, very clear staffing responsibilities, a clear understanding of how to get news to the local media and regional media and often national and international media during a crisis. All of which when they are combined help people make those good decisions. It is very very hard to plan and to think about crisis communication strategy in the middle of a crisis. It really needs to take place well ahead of time. So you can literally go to your checklists, go to your plan and start acting in your publics' interest ahead of time".

JS: "What kind of crisis communications plan does your (previous) employer have - and how often is it practiced, updated and used?"

SS: "Well we actually work with different companies and different government agencies to create their plans. So we have written a number of them. They are practiced fairly frequently, more commonly with these crises of confidence rather than natural disasters. Natural disasters are obviously very very challenging and often very serious but fortunately they don't happen very frequently. The sort of illegal, immoral, unethical actions that are often taken tend to happen more frequently but require a crisis communications response as well. Typically we recommend updating a crisis communication plan about once a year. And that includes not just updating the plan itself, but also doing exercises and drills with the appropriate staff members to make sure that everything is up to date, that it works properly to make any additional changes to make sure it is as effective as can be."

JS: "I feel like you already answered this question in one of the first questions that I had about what is a crisis communication plan but could you reiterate the importance of having a crisis communication plan for a company or a government agency?"

SS: "Yeah. It really is not optional. In fact, it is mandatory. Because at some point every company and every government agency is going to face some sort of crisis, whether it is a natural disaster or crisis of confidence. And when they face that crisis they need to be able to act quickly to help people make good decisions and to maintain their credibility as they respond to their crisis. The only way to do that is to have a plan in place and ready to go when the crisis hits. You absolutely cannot create one during the crisis itself."

JS: "What city are you currently in?"

SS: "I live in the city of Pleasanton up in the Bay Area, but we work with cities all over California."

JS: "The next question is the media's roles regarding crisis communication in the city you live in, but it could be maybe for all of California too."

SS: "The media is the most efficient way that a company or a government agency can communicate with a large number of people. And by media in this case I mean a blend of traditional media such as television, radio and traditional newspaper outlets, but also increasingly, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. All of those traditional and social media channels added together helps a company or an agency get news to the largest number of people most quickly. Its interesting, that in spite of the growth of social media, local television is still the most efficient way to get news to a large number of people quickly. It still has the largest number of viewers and consumers of news than any other traditional or social media channel. In virtually every city, whether its urban, suburban or rural the traditional media in some areas, radio, some areas, television, some areas print or online; serves a very very important role in getting fast breaking news and news about changing conditions to people that need to receive it. And it really does serve a unique role. There is no substitute for the importance of the media during a crisis."

JS: "So, what are your opinions the way the media typically handles crises in your city or in California?"

SS: "I find the media tends to be very very responsible during crises. Often where there are problems, it is because a company or a government agency hasn't understood the needs of the media, hasn't understood their responsibility in providing news and information to residents, business owners, visitors and anybody that needs that information. Generally, the media tries to be responsible and I think really upholds its role as a very very important part of the crisis communications fix. That said, the media is only as good as the information that they are able to get. Which is why it truly is a partnership between local agencies or companies and the media in helping people get the news that they need. A vast majority of the time I find the media actually very responsible during a crisis."

JS: "I know some people feel that the media, especially the broadcast media look for a story, and try to get the story in any means possible. Do you feel like that is a failure on part of the media or the organization?"

SS: "I mean, media looks for stories that are going to interest the largest numbers of viewers, or listeners or readers. Often that tends to be the negative type of stories. I don't find that they go out of their way to try to be inaccurate or to exaggerate or try and misrepresent a story. Yes there is some of that, but particularly during a crisis, I find the media takes their responsibility very very seriously in getting people the information they need. Often government agencies or companies are slow to respond or don't understand deadlines, don't understand for example, televisions need for visuals and radios need for sound, that sort of thing. We also don't find all the time, the need to explain what is going on in language that is understandable by the public, and for reporters. A lot of times communication is done using jargon terms, language that is very hard to understand. During a crisis, people are worried, they are distracted and they are frightened. And we need to communicate with them in language that recognizes that they may not be paying full attention and may not

have time to think about what we said. We need to make it very very clear and very very efficient.”

JS: “Okay so, the next question is a little bit of a jump. If you worked in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, what do you think you would have done differently and why?”

SS: “Hurricane Katrina was a major fail on a number of fronts. There was very poor communication with the public. There was very poor communication between different levels of government, whether it was city of New Orleans, state of Louisiana, FEMA at the national level. There was a bit of arrogance on the part of some communicators. The net result in terms of what should have been done differently is almost everything. Better coordination, more rapid response, just a much better constructed plan before something happened. I think the outgrowth of Katrina is a good one in that because things went so poorly in New Orleans and people lost their lives and lost property, perhaps that didn’t need to if the communication had been better. A lot of agencies have learned from that. They’ve changed the way they do business, they’ve changed the way they communicate with the public, and they’ve changed the way they communicate with each other. So, there are some positive things now, 11 years later that have come out of that. And will continue to keep getting better. It really did come down to; I think most importantly, a lack of coordination.”

JS: “So if you were a consultant for the city of New Orleans, do you think you would have had a better plan enacted beforehand?”

SS: “Yes I would have had a much better plan beforehand. I would have made sure that elected officials, including the mayor, were part of that plan. I would have made sure that all department heads were part of that plan. I would have made sure that the plan included coordination in getting mutual aid and assistance from other agencies was part of that plan as well. So I think a number of things if I was there I would have done differently during Katrina. From my perspective, watching from the outside, it seemed very very disjointed. Subsequent books that I have read on Katrina and news coverage in the decade since it happened; I think have verified that it was extremely uncoordinated. You know one example of things that have changed, one of the most difficult pieces of Katrina, separate from obviously people getting hurt, losing their lives, their homes, but being separated from their pets. You have people who never saw their pets again. And research has shown that during a crisis, having people stay with their pets or their pets accompany them, whether it’s in a shelter or someplace like the Superdome in Katrina’s case, wherever it might be an help people get through a very difficult time. Communication now, has evolved in similar disasters; there is very very clear communication about how people can stay with their pets, what they should do with them, how they can be reunited with them afterward. That sort of thing. It’s one small piece, but I think it illustrates something that went very wrong during Katrina, but that has since been improved. And how you can learn from each crisis that you go through.”

JS: "So again the question, I feel like you already answered, because your answers are all encompassing, but are there any lessons we can learn from hurricane Katrina and the way the media handled the disaster?"

SS: "You know I feel the media did the best job they could. I don't know that there was anything more they could do. Again, the coverage is more than a decade old now, so the media has changed quite a bit. Obviously there would be a much greater reliance on Twitter, and other social media channels today. Twitter didn't even exist in 2005 when Katrina happened. So you would have a very different approach. But I think the media did as good a job as they could have given, in many cases was very little information when Katrina was happening. So you always learn from it. You learn who your sources are, you learn who you can go to. For example, today you would be able to launch a drone and get aerial coverage. You know, drones didn't exist in 2005. So that gives the media an additional tool. Twitter also allows immediate and very broad communication between the public, different agencies and the media as well. So, a lot of lessons to be learned. And I am pretty sure the local media there made very clear what they need the next time something like that happens."

JS: "What is the importance of communication before, during and after a disaster hits and why?"

SS: "You can't overstate the importance of good communication during a crisis. When a natural disaster or that type of even occurs, it impacts people in a way, almost like nothing else. If you are threatened, if your family or your friends are threatened, or your property, you often lose the ability to think clearly, to make good decisions to the extent that a local government agency or a company and the media as a partner can help people make those good decisions. It is one of the most critical pieces of any type of disaster response, so it is absolutely essential."

JS: "And, is there anything else you would like to add about this subject?"

SS: "I think, we are seeing a lot of government agencies and companies recognizing that they need to have a crisis communications plan in place. That is very gratifying to see. Every time there is a crisis, whether it is a natural disaster or crisis of confidence we learn something. And as technology changes, and as different media channels evolve, and the predominance of social media, we need to keep pace with those changes as well. People are consuming information in new ways. It is very immediate, we don't have time to think, or to plan, or to ponder these things. Our response has to be virtually immediate. And a crisis communications plan, a good well thought out crisis communications plan, allows you to do that."

Appendix C

Interview Transcript: Chris Saunders

The following interview was conducted to get an expert opinion on media coverage before, during and after a natural disaster and crisis communication practices.

Interviewer: Juliet Saunders

Respondent: Public Relations Manager at Palomar Health, Chris Saunders.
Has spent 20 plus years in broadcast and public relations/communication,
including law schools and the San Diego Sheriff's Department.

Date of Interview: 8/18/16

Interview Transcription:

Juliet Saunders: "In your opinion – what is a crisis in terms of PR?"

Chris Saunders: "I think a crisis occurs when there is an event involving your company or your organization that needs immediate attention to keep it from looking extremely negative to the public and the rest of the world that is affected by your organization. And your organization itself, in other words, its to prevent damage. And sometimes a crisis occurs even if there isn't an external event. Like for example, in my hospital, if there is a big brush fire that threatens the hospital, which has happened one time. That's an external thing. But what happens if something goes wrong a patient, or there is some kind of a scandal that involves an employee that isn't public? Well you still have to plan for that and make sure you handle it in a way that does the best good for the reputation and operation of your organization."

JS: "Why is crisis communication important after a disaster?"

CS: "It is extremely important to communicate to the public important information they need to know to prevent them from being injured or their property being damaged by a disaster. In the case of the hospital, we would inform the public that we have set up extra beds at the hospital to handle any incoming that are injured by the disaster. It's also important to communicate these things to our own people. The internal audience at an organization is just as important, if not more important, than the external audience. And, of course, the best way to communicate externally is by the media. And there's quite a few ways of reaching the media. Calling live news briefings is one way. Sending out group emails to the media is another. But, maybe the best method of all in these times is using social media and your website to communicate. Those tools have become all important. So we are talking, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and of course using your website's emergency capabilities. Because, studies have shown that thousands of people will use your website to get the latest information. We are talking about information that could save lives and avoid property damage."

JS: "In your own words what is a crisis communications plan?"

CS: "Well I'm working on one right now for my hospital. We have disaster plans for the hospital, but the communication part of it has not been developed enough. To me, it is very similar to the hospitals' disaster plan, anticipating various types of disasters and how we will handle them. If for example, there is a brush fire that comes close to the hospital and we have to evacuate the hospital, then there are plans on how to do that properly. But we also have to think about how we would handle communications in that plan. Now, there is an internal process whereby people can be notified by text messages and by email and by other methods. But, we also need to notify the public, what's going on. Let's say you have a loved one that is staying at the hospital, and you hear on the news that the hospital is being evacuated, we not only would tell the media to announce the evacuation, but where the patients are going as well. Whether we are transferring them to Tri-City Hospital or to Pomorado Hospital or to our downtown hospital. We have to think about the loved ones as well as the patients and communicate that information. Because we are trying to prevent people from getting panicked about what's happening. So number one is communicating about loved ones. So we would come up with different scenarios, earthquake, fire, lets say there is an active shooter in the hospital; we have to think through every one of those scenarios and come up with a plan on how we react. And each one of those scenarios has to have a media component to it. What will we tell the media? And more importantly, who is going to tell the media, who is going to be the designated spokesperson in this instance? And I would think that in major incidents, it's going to be the CEO of the hospital, and we would speak with one voice. But, part of the crisis plan is also designating in advance what the roles of different members of your team are going to be. Let's say I am the main crisis communications manager for the hospital during an incident, but I can't do it alone, I am going to have to have a team doing different things. For example, monitoring the media, updating the website and social media and communicating with different branches of our organization to get the latest information...it takes a team. And we can't work 24/7, so we are going to have to set up schedules for who is going to be working 12 hours on, then who is going to be working the next 12 hours.

During the firestorms [In San Diego] in 2003 at the Sheriff's Department, we set up a communication schedule among my department, where I would 12 hours, and then I would go home and sleep. And another team, designated by us, part of our department would take over for the next 12 hours. And then we would come back. So it was 12 on, 12 off, very much like they do for deputies and firefighters.

So your communications plan, needs to cover all those eventualities. And you also have to plan for things like power outages. If the power goes out, will the hospital have back-up power on site? Yes we will. But if in my office over in San Marcos, if the power goes out, will I be able to communicate effectively with the media, and will I have a satellite phone if the cell phones are overloaded, which was a problem in the Sheriff's department in 2003. So basically, you have to think of as many possible scenarios as you can, based on history and also a little out of the box thinking, with what could happen but haven't happened yet. And then come up with a way of handling each scenario using the basic principles of crisis communication.

My main tenant of crisis communications is this; the public needs to know that their concerns are also your concerns. Whatever they are worried, you are also not only concerned about, but are taking care of. I used the example already of if the hospital is evacuated...then how do we communicate with the family and friends of the patients of the patients who are there. Well we use the media to get the message out, the patients will be going to Pomorado hospital, or the Patients will be going to Tri-City Hospital, and this is an orderly process, everyone is safe and there is nothing to worry about.

That is, I think, the best example of that you need to answer the publics concerns. Another example, when there was a shooter at Kelly Elementary School in Carlsbad, the spokesperson for the Carlsbad Police, the number one thing that he wanted to communicate is that 'there is no longer an active shooter and all your children are safe. You can reunite with them at this location'. Of course he also had to talk about the fact that there were two children that were injured by gunfire but not seriously. So he assured the parents that their children were safe, and there were two children, injured and taken to Rady Chilren's Hospital. So that was his number one concern, and it was also the publics number one concern. And of course what happened to the shooter, is he in custody, has he been disarmed, is he still a danger? So, you have to think about exactly who your audience is when you are talking to the media. You are talking to several audiences, but the most important audience is the loved ones of the people affected by the disaster or incident. That's number one. And also this goes right along with my main tenant, you need somebody in a position who is going to reassure the public that you are handling the situation in an effective, competent and safe manner. For example, during the firestorms in 2003, the Sheriff was that voice for us. He was the voice of calm, telling people exactly what's going on, how we are handling it, and answering their fears and concerns in a reassuring way. There needs to be a voice of reason and reassurance.

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani was that voice in New York City during 9/11. He wasn't speaking just for the city; he was speaking for the nation. In that moment, it was almost as if he were the President of the United States. He said some very very important, very reassuring and unifying things to the people of New York City and I don't think anybody who saw him speak that day will ever forget his presence. I don't remember the words he used, but I do remember his calm and authoritative presence. He made you think the authorities are handling this, and we don't have chaos. That's what people worry about."

JS: "What kind of crisis communication plan does your (previous) employer have – and how often is it practiced, updated and used?"

CS: "My previous employer had an extremely detailed communications plan. Staging areas for the media, who would be speaking, how do we handle this type of emergency, how do we handle another type of situation? It was a very detailed communications plan. It was exactly the kind of thing I was describing before in question three."

JS: "Okay, why is a crisis communication plan important to have?"

CS: "Well I think we have answered that question. You cannot go into any kind of crisis or incident without knowing how you are going to handle it in advance and that is why we plan these scenarios. Or you use history. We see not only we did in a given situation but what other institutions or organizations have done in similar situations. We feel that the most important thing is to learn what the best practices are and apply them to the situation. So my mantra has to be, best practices...what are the best ways of handling this crisis in terms of communications? So we learn from each other, organizations talk to each other about things like this and we pay attention to what other organization do in these situations. And we will learn from what they did right, and learn from what they might not have done so well. Just like we did in the Sheriff's department after the 2003 firestorms, we did something called an After Action Report. We considered everything that occurred during that emergency within our department, including our communications and our methods of communicating with the public. Because of that, some improvements were made. For example, we used to do door-to-door evacuations in the Sheriff's department. We would announce to the media that there were evacuations, but we would also go door-to-door. Then, after 2003, when a lot of people did not get notified of their evacuations in time, we went to a system called reverse 9-11. Where we can designate a neighborhood, or a large area to receive a phone call saying 'there is a brush fire moving toward you're area, you must evacuate now.' So that system was put into play in 2007 for the Witch Creek fire, and it worked very well. There were some problems with it; as a matter of fact we got evacuated in our neighborhood. But we never got a phone call because the system did not reach everyone it was supposed to. And I think it was counting on neighbors to go door-to-door saying 'hey did you get the call?' Well that flaw has been fixed. There were a number of big issues that came up then. In law enforcement, one of the big issues in 2003, is that our 9-11 call takers and dispatchers did not know the latest information about where the fire was, where it was going and who was being evacuated, so they gave out some erroneous information to the public. And the public calls 911, not because they have emergencies most of the time, but because they want to know something. Where is the fire? Do I need to evacuate? That's not what 911 is for, but our call takers didn't know what to tell them. So we installed a series of television monitors around the communications center with the latest information. The Sheriff's department has used that many times in emergencies since. Let's say that there is an incident at a school, our TV screens would say 'all children at Smith elementary school are safe in there classrooms. The incident is over and children will be reunited with their families at this location.' So obviously, the communication plan is so that you don't have to make it up as you go. You use past history, best practices and experiences of other organization similar to yours, to handle communicating to the public. Communicating to the public is all-important, because we could be talking life or death information that they need to know, or just information that they need to know to survive on their own. Law enforcement or firefighters can't always be there. So we need to tell communicate to people to boil their water or things along those lines."

JS: "In your opinion – what are the medias' roles regarding crisis communication after a disaster?"

CS: "The media realizes that it plays an important role in crisis situations, and they are very good about understanding that role and getting the latest greatest information out. It is up to us to get the information to them and make sure that it is being transmitted to the public properly. Which is why people on your team need to be monitoring what the media says. What is being printed and what is being said on television and radio, because sometimes they get it wrong and we need to correct it. I've had a lot of experience with that, especially during the 2003 firestorms when erroneous information went out. And one thing about the media, that is mentioned in this paper that I have just finished reading on crisis communications; it's a case study on Louisiana, if we don't tell them...then how can they get it right? And that comes into play frequently during different situations, especially shooting situations that are active. If we don't tell them the right story, they are going to put out the wrong story, so it's very important to get the right story to the media as quickly as possible. And time and again we've seen them put out erroneous information because we were not there to tell them the facts in a timely way. So those are two important things."

JS: "What are your opinions on the way the media typically handles crises in your city?"

CS: "In San Diego County I would say they get an A+. The media here does a wonderful job of understanding their role in communicating important information to the public, and they step up and do the job very well. In San Diego County I would say they get an A+. The media here does a wonderful job of understanding their role in communicating important information to the public, and they step up and do the job very well. We had a case in the 2003 firestorms; one of the TV stations announced that three firefighters had been killed while fighting the fire in Julian, well that wasn't true. We had three injured firefighters, and one of them did wind up dying. The problem is, is that the other TV stations, hearing that station one say that there had been three fatalities, they started reporting it too. 'There are reports where three firefighters had been killed.' Well can you imagine the panic that spreads through the family of the firefighters in San Diego County who happen to be watching television...and if they happen to know if their son or daughter or husband or wife is actually fighting the fire in Julian? That's why it's very important for the media to make absolutely sure it is disseminating correct information and not going off with 'there are reports that' you have to be sure of what you are saying. And I think the San Diego media does a really good job of that. One of the worst examples that I can ever think of, of the media being irresponsible is the shooting of congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in Tucson Arizona. That was where the sick young man came up with a gun and opened fire on a lot of people and she was shot between the eyes and taken to a hospital in Tucson where the media was waiting on for condition reports on her. One reporter who was on television live across the nation, reported that she had died and said 'we have information from sources in

the hospital that congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords has died'. And of course she is alive and well to this day. And that was a horrible mistake, a mistake that you do not ever want to make. So how could the reporter have prevented that? Simply getting it from an official source, and in that case, it would be whoever is doing my job at the hospital. Their job would be to inform the media of her condition and certainly if she has passed away, we are going to let the public know as quickly as we can, but we also have to make sure that next of kin is notified. You don't ever want the family of someone who has been killed or seriously injured in the line of duty for your organization; you don't want the family to ever find out about it by watching television or hearing it on the radio. So it's extremely important for us and the media to remember that the loved ones of any victim need to be notified before any public announcement is made. And the media needs to make sure that they only put official information out in situations like that. And of course, the Gabrielle Giffords case is not the only time that has ever happened. It happened one time in Washington D.C. where the news went on and announced that mayor Marion Barry had been shot and killed. And this would have been in the early 80's. Well it was a hoax. Somebody called the newsroom and reported it and the TV station went on the air and said 'mayor Marion Barry has been shot and killed', well he wasn't, it never happened, it was a hoax. So that tells you that you need to verify things and get them from official sources. So that's the responsibility of the media, and I generally think they do a very good job."

JS: "If you worked in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, what do you think you would have done differently and why?"

CS: "Well that's hard for me to answer because I don't know exactly what they did down there but I know it was rather chaotic. So my question to them post Katrina, 'did you have an effective crisis communications plan along with all your other disaster plans, and did you implement it properly? Was the public getting the information they needed to survive the incident?' I don't know the answer to that. I know that a few years later when hurricane Gustav hit the Louisiana area, things were handled a lot better, in fact the Governor of Louisiana, Bobby Jindal, according to this research that I am reading did an exemplary job of reassuring the public as well as telling them information that they really needed to know. So I think that if they were not doing those things, if I were at Katrina at the time, I would have had a communications plan in effect and I would have utilized it. Because, not only is the disaster bad in it of itself but there can be second injury in addition to that. And that is when the authorities and the media don't get the best information out to the public and they can make mistakes that result in people getting injured or property being damaged. For example, if you don't warn people that they should not drive through flooded intersections, sometimes people will assume its safe and they will get swept away. So that's the kind of critical information that you need to get out. And of course in Katrina, that was extremely important to warn people what to do and what not to do. Don't touch electrical lines, turn off the power to your home so you don't get electrocuted, a lot of important things like that. So I think lessons were learned."

JS: "Are there any lessons we can learn from Hurricane Katrina and the way the media handled the disaster?"

CS: "Well we've talked about the lessons from Katrina, the media handled it the best they could, it was a chaotic situation. One thing that is critical in a situation like that is setting up what is called a Joint Information Center, a J-I-C. And that's one of the things that we teach at CSTI, California Specialized Training Institute, a JIC is where you bring together spokespeople for various agencies involved so everybody that is there will be able to inform the media about what is going on. It might be, let's say the Mayor, Chief of Police, Fire Chief, Community Health Officer, SDG&E, your utility companies, your public works people who control flooding...So basically what you do is you bring the media all together in one place and then you have all the people that they need to talk to in one place and you have a coordinated response. And that's what we did during the 2003 firestorms. I set up a briefing room in the counties' emergency operation center, and we had regular briefings for the media. And so they basically stayed put. The only trouble was the City of San Diego also did their own briefings at a different time and location, so the media actually didn't have enough crews to be everywhere at once so they were actually going back and forth between the briefings. They called it dueling news conferences. We immediately contacted the city after their first news conference and said, 'we should be doing this together at one location,' they refused. So there was lack of cooperation between agencies' there, it was not a healthy situation. Now, in 2007, that didn't happen, there was coordination and everybody was on the same page and worked together. So that's a big lesson that comes out of Katrina and local disasters in San Diego County."

JS: "What is the importance of communication before, during and after a disaster hits and why?"

CS: "Well, we have touched on some of that. Obviously, if a storm is coming, if a hurricane is coming, you'll have several days of advanced warning usually. So it is all-important to communicate to the public, that it's coming and if they need to evacuate, or what steps they need to take to be safe and to have the supplies that they need for their family to eat and to have water. And do they need to reinforce their homes with plywood over the windows, things like that. Or is it smarter for them to leave the area and get out of harms way. So the advanced communication is all-important. And then you are telling them if you find that you must evacuate, the evacuation centers will be here. All these things are set up in advance and need to be communicated in advance, so that when it hits, there is minimal confusion. And the same applies for during the event, we are giving out information that enables people to survive whatever the event is. And we are again reassuring them so that they don't panic. People need to know that you are in charge, you are on it, you are competent, and you are doing what needs to be done to handle the situation in the best possible way. And that is another critical thing about crisis communications. And obviously during, you want to communicate with the media as best you can

using whatever channels you have, live briefings, which basically are press conferences, and social media-which we didn't have in 2003, and using your website, which we did have. Another thing that I haven't mentioned is we set up a 2-1-1 system, where volunteers come in and answer critical questions for the public. We had a team of volunteers on stand-by; there is always a team on stand-by, the 2-1-1 systems can be activated very quickly. And so that's another channel for people to call in and get individual information about their situation. 'I live in Otay Valley, are we going to be flooded, where do I evacuate to?' And so you need to keep the telephone operators who are answering those information calls well informed as possible. That's part of your communications plan. Who is going to be interacting with the public, and how do we get them the latest, greatest information? To save lives, preserve property, prevent injury, and also to let loved ones know. We would make suggestions like, if you are affected by the fire and you have relatives in other parts of the country, rather than making the calls yourself, you could call somebody. Say you have a relative in Boston, you have lots of relatives in Boston, call one relative and tell them to call all the other relatives and that way their won't be jammed phone lines going in and out of San Diego or wherever the city is. So setting up phone trees is one of the best practices. Afterwards, assuming that the emergency is over, it's very very important to basically let the public know what the lessons learned were. 'We handled this extremely well in this area, but there is a challenge in this other area, we could have communicated to residents better, which is why we are looking at having reverse 911.' So basically you want to kind of step back and do a post mortem, what worked, what didn't work. And let the public know that more of you needed to evacuate or more of you needed to have a supply of drinking water, or steps that they could have taken to protect themselves and their families and their property. And so the why is obviously because if it can happen once it can happen again and look at Louisiana, first they had Katrina and then they had Gustav and now they are having terrible flooding there right now. It's not on the magnitude of Katrina, but it has happened again, and so the lessons learned are being applied. And we have had other major firestorms in San Diego, of course we had 2003 where there were a lot of things that did not go well, and then in 2007 many of those very things that were big challenges in 2003, were handled smoothly in 2007."

JS: "Okay. And is there anything else you would like to add?"

CS: "I think that a very key thing about crisis communication is you must always tell the truth. There is no room for fudging. Everything, always comes out it seems like, and so you don't want to be caught in a situation where you were lying to or misleading the media or the public. And you always to have to keep in mind when you are speaking to the media, you are speaking to the public. So that's another key component of my crisis communications theory. Tell the truth. Now, there are times when you can hold back certain information, that happens all the time in law enforcement, when there is an investigation, let's say a murder investigation, investigators can't tell the media and the public everything they know because that would harm the investigation. It might let the suspect know that they are in fact

wanted and they might flee, or there is information that only the perpetrator would know that if they happen to interview that perpetrator and the suspect says, 'well yeah I know that body had a plastic bag over its head and the hands were tied behind its back'. And the detectives might go 'well gee that's interesting we never announced that to the public, how do you know that?' then they have just convicted themselves. So, you know there are areas where for the good of the public, information has to be held back for a time. But in the end you are as upfront and forthright with them as you can possibly be given the situation. And so truth is everything. I see every crisis as an opportunity for you to make your organization look good. Now we are not saying that we are trying to put lipstick on a tragedy, so to speak. But if we demonstrate that we are prepared and we are handling it in the best possible way and learning lessons from things that did not go so well, then that builds trust in our organization. People will tend to trust us more and believe in us more, it enhances our credibility and reputation. So every situation, no matter how bad it appears, is an opportunity to show the public that you take their concerns seriously, that you are going to learn and grow from the situation. But also, letting them know the things that you did well and did right. So I am not trying to say put a good face on a bad situation, I am saying be honest and use every crisis as an opportunity to demonstrate that your organization is trustworthy and competent and it enhances your reputation. And if you have made mistakes, own up to them and show that it will never happen again."