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Breaking Tradition: A Look at Crisis Management Mechanisms in the Federal Government

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Prepared for: Prof. Zussman
7/21/2012

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Abstract

This research will examine current Canadian Government crisis management mechanisms, in order to evaluate their effectiveness once applied to a crisis situation. The improvement of crisis management by government could lead to more comprehensive and coordinated approaches towards crisis preparedness and response. The area of crisis management is an often neglected, yet vital part of government operations. Whether operational decisions during a crisis are politically inspired or genuinely practical, good management of the processes involved with making these determinations is imperative. The government needs to anticipate not only the broadest spectrum of difficulties that may arise during a crisis but the many options available for responding to them. This challenge may be facilitated by incorporating a generic crisis management response mechanism as a component in departments' standard operating guidelines. Consistently, various levels of government have been primarily reactive in how they prepare for crises, by focusing on them only once they occur. This can lead to inefficient and ineffective responses, particularly with the misallocation of resources such as funding and the identification of lead response personnel. An overreliance on what has been employed traditionally, regardless of its efficiency or effectiveness, often takes place. This paper will examine some of these issues as it seeks to recommend preparedness versus reactive responses to crises. Furthermore, the use of proper crisis communications techniques would serve to mitigate negative effects once a crisis emerges.

Introduction

As a result of emergencies, disasters or catastrophes there is often chaos, uncertainty and an identified need for clear leadership roles. This paper analyses current crisis management theory and practices, and applies it to government decision-making. There are a variety of events which pose the risk of turning into a crisis, some hazardous and others that draw public attention: policy failure, financial emergencies, natural hazards, anarchy (riots or civil wars), political emergencies, human security issues, and technological disasters. These kinds of events all require coordinated and effective responses. If treated improperly or responded to in a way which would only serve to exasperate the situation, such events can change from emergent issues to crisis situations. In order to maintain public confidence in the government there is usually an appropriate sequence of government actions required to deal effectively with any crisis. The government's first responses are crucial in ensuring that the amount of destruction of both lives and property are minimised. In addition, those same first responses will determine citizen confidence in their government's capability to protect them. Therefore, sound and anticipatory crisis management is a necessary factor for dealing with any crisis situation. In modern society, the security of the person and public is an essential responsibility of the government. Governments have vast resources available at their discretion. These resources are accessible so that they can be used in response to a crisis situation or other emergency issues as the government deems appropriate.

While examining the various considerations of crisis management in the Canadian government, this paper questions whether the government makes poor crisis management decisions. In its examination of crisis management by government, this paper will examine crisis

situations that could have the potential to damage the image of government. The causes and correlations between governmental ineffectiveness and poor decisions need to be examined in order to improve the government's response to a crisis. The thesis of this paper is that Canadian governments may tend to make poor crisis management decisions in order to further a political agenda. This is demonstrated through reactive decision making as opposed to solid preparedness planning. The government often neglects certain principles of good crisis management in favour of avoiding contentious issues or sidestepping responsibility. By their very nature these decisions are often made with little time for public debate, but they nevertheless have a direct impact on both public well-being and confidence in the government itself.

Governments are increasingly susceptible to public reviews, legal sanctions and long term implications as a result of poor crisis management; therefore the government has to be both prepared and proactive in its response to crises. Due to their sporadic nature, each crisis has its own distinct timeline; a crisis can be an emergency (poorly planned or executed response), it can be emergent (quick onset) and it can be on-going (longer duration). Therein is the difficulty with crises, time. As the majority of crises are unpredictable, have long term implications, and are ever changing, they require governments to have a 360° preparedness mechanism in place.

The government should review its current crisis management plans and response mechanisms in exchange for a more proactive approach to crises. By discussing three main areas, a better understanding of where government can become more efficient can be found. These three areas are: the principle components of crisis, the political ramifications of managing a crisis and the communication imperatives. Through the analysis of these three areas a better understanding of where government can become more efficient can be found. Following the literature and theoretical discussion, this study will delve into a case study, which presents one of

the most important areas of effective crisis management, crisis communications. The case study will examine the way that the Canadian government responded to a communications crisis which emerged as a result of the Canadian Forces (CF).

A crisis can take on many forms, it can be defined broadly or specifically and some of the emergency events listed above act as enablers to the onset of crises. Due to this varied nature of crises, understanding crises through research and practical preparedness could lead to less redundancy and more efficiency in all stages of crisis management. By progressing through the various aspects of this paper, the reader will understand how a government's response to crises can be both the positive and negative. But firstly, what is a crisis? It is important to understand the different terminology used within government in relation to crises.

What is Crisis Management?

Crisis management encompasses a number of complex issues and requires a firm understanding of what a crisis is, therefore understanding the difference between a crisis and an emergency is important. Crises differ from emergencies, as an emergency may turn into a crisis, but a crisis may not always be an emergency. To maintain continuity it is necessary to define such terms under the standards set by the Government of Canada. According to the Government of Canada's *Communication Policy*, a crisis is "a situation that somehow challenges the public's sense of appropriateness, tradition, values, safety, security or the integrity of the government."¹ As it is the government's responsibility to maintain a society's "appropriateness," its response to critical situations should mitigate the public concern.

¹Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Treasury Board Policy Suite.(2006). *Communication Policy of the Government of Canada*. Retrieved from website: <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=12316&ion=text>

An emergency, on the other hand, is also important to define as it is distinct from a crisis. The government definition of an emergency is “an abnormal situation that requires prompt action, beyond normal procedures, in order to limit damage to persons, property or the environment.”² A few examples of recent large-scale emergencies would include: the Indonesian Tsunami in 2004³ and the Ice Storm of 1998.⁴ From these definitions we can draw the primary distinction between a crisis and an emergency, as an emergency requires damage to be done to persons, property or the environment, but a crisis does not specify this requirement. This is not to say that emergencies are unable to turn into crisis situations, in fact, if there is a perception that the government has lost control of a situation it is possible that a crisis can emerge. Therefore, effective and efficient crisis management is required in order to “prevent injury or loss of life, to help limit damage to assets and property, to help maintain public services, to assist in the process of recovery, and to help maintain or restore public confidence in the government.”⁵

In the event of an emergency or a crisis, the government’s role is to provide leadership. According to Arjen Boin, Paul 't Hart, Eric Stern and Bengt Sundelius, leadership refers to “a set of strategic tasks that encompasses all activities associated with the stages of crisis management.”⁶ These tasks are: sense making; decision making; meaning making; terminating; and learning.⁷ These five steps will be further explored and examined in the subsequent section of this paper.

²Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Treasury Board Policy Suite.(2006).

³Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Office of the Inspector General Evaluation Division. (2005). *Lessons from the tsunami: Review of the response of foreign affairs Canada to the December 26, 2004 Indian ocean tsunami crisis*. Retrieved from website: http://www.international.gc.ca/about-a_propos/oig-big/2005/evaluation/tsunami.aspx?lang=eng&view=d

⁴Lecomte, E., Pang, A., & Russell, J. (1999). Ice storm '98. *Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction, 1*, 1-37. Diane Pub. Co. Retrieved from <http://directory.cip.management.dal.ca/publications/ICE STORM 98.pdf>

⁵Lecomte, E., Pang, A., & Russell, J. (1999).

⁶Boin, A., Hart, P., Stern, E., & Sundelius, B. (2005). *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership Under Pressure*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

⁷Ibid.

In its role as a leader, the government must provide optimal crisis management. Crisis management, as is outlined by Boin and his colleagues, encompasses “a set of interrelated and extraordinary governance challenges. It provides an ultimate test for the resilience of political systems and their elites.”⁸ This definition is universal in that it includes the various crisis situations presented at the beginning of this paper and provides the complexities facing decision makers. These four terms and concepts, amongst others, will be used throughout this paper. The importance of defining these terms is important to understanding effective management in crisis situations.

What is the Current Policy in Canada?

The Government of Canada’s policy towards crises is generally managed by the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) and the Privy Council’s Office (PCO) and implemented by various departments. By mandating the TBS and PCO, two central agencies of government, to determine the policy and response of government in crisis situations, the government has created a universal approach to crisis management across government. Generally, this requirement from the central agency is that departments must be quick in their response, open to their approach and planning must have taken place beforehand. As TBS presents:

Institutions must recognize that extraordinary and rapid efforts may be required in times of crisis or emergency. They must be prepared to adjust priorities and resources accordingly. The necessary plans, partnerships, tools and methods must be in place to allow government officials to communicate effectively and efficiently in both official languages during an emergency or a crisis.⁹

⁸Ibid. pp1-2

⁹ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Treasury Board Policy Suite. (2006)

With such general policy guidance from the center, each department can adapt crisis responses to its own standards. For example the Department of National Defence approaches crisis management as follows:

Effective management of an issue, both open and within the law, minimizes the likelihood of its escalation into a crisis. In contrast, issues that are poorly managed affect the credibility of an organization, undermining staff or public confidence and contributing to the emergence of crises.

For these reasons, it is necessary for organizations to respond to issues and crises quickly and decisively and, subject to security policy, in as open a fashion as possible.¹⁰

The examination of the government's current policy, against suggested best practices will determine whether the government should re-evaluate its approach to crisis management in favour of more anticipatory and proactive mechanisms.

Discussion – Crisis Management

The literature on crisis management proposes alternative ideas for how governments should respond to crises. The research establishes three areas that influence effective crisis management: the principle components of crisis management, the political ramifications of managing a crisis and crisis communication imperatives. These three areas are integral parts of any government's approach to crises. In *Exploring Public Relations*, Ralph Tench and Liz Yeomans examine the principles which constitute crisis management, this is important as it will undoubtedly pertain to the government's response during the various stages of a crisis.

Secondly, a discussion from a variety of perspectives will occur which will present a general

¹⁰ Department of National Defence, Assistant Deputy Minister- Finance. (2003). *Issue and crisis management* (DAOD 2008-3). Retrieved from National Defence and Canadian Forces website: <http://www.admfincs.forces.gc.ca/dao-doa/2000/2008-3-eng.asp>

overview of the politics which may influence a crisis situation. The author Boine in the book he co-authored, *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure* provides the most in-depth analysis of the influence of politics on government decision making. Within the politics discussion, a conversation regarding a new approach towards comprehensive crisis management, in the article “Crises and Crisis Management: Toward Comprehensive Government Decision Making” written by Uriel Rosenthal and Alexander Kouzmin occurs. This conversation examines the idea of a holistic approach to crisis management. The last discussion in the politics section will be a look towards the future of crisis management and ways to increase the effectiveness of government in response to crises, which is presented in the article “A New Approach to Crisis Management,” Bertrand Robert & Chris Lajtha. In the third section of the paper, crisis communications imperatives, one of the most important components of crisis management will be discussed. Issues surrounding crisis communications and the importance of strong communications plans will be explored and presented. Often the success of a government’s response can be determined by the way it communicates during a time of crisis.

It is important to understand the crisis cycle, as it will have an effect on when and how governments should respond. The life cycle of a crisis issue, as presented by Michael Regester and Judy Larkin, can be broken down into four simple stages, which can be further expanded: origin, mediation and amplification, organization, resolution. The first stage is the “origin: potential issue.”¹¹ In this stage the initial issue is seen as a potential. The issue starts out unnoticed until it gains traction due to an individual or an organization attaching “significance” to it.¹² This significance can often be seen in the development of a news story, as the media prints a story and tries to draw public attention to the article, it is seeking the application of

¹¹ Regester, M. & Larkin, J. (1997). *Risk issues and crisis management: A case book of best practices*. London, United Kingdom: The Institute of Public Relations. Clays Ltd, St Ives plc. P49

¹² Ibid.

significance. Once significance is applied, the issue must be defined. This happens when the organization or individual that has attached significance decides to do something regarding the situation which may affect another group or individual.¹³ As is the case when the media draws public attention to a possible area of concern, this occurred when, in 2011, the media drew attention to travel spending by the Chief of Defence Staff in 2011.¹⁴ Therefore, it is important for government officials to plan for crisis situations, as Boin and his colleagues mention, “crisis planning helps more than crisis plans ever will in coordinating crisis response operations.”¹⁵

The second stage, “mediation and amplification: emerging issues,”¹⁶ is when the issue concretizes and becomes an emerging concern. This is the stage when a government will start to feel pressure from external forces to take action. The government will be tempted to make a spontaneous and quick reaction but such haste can exacerbate the problem. During this phase it is likely that the media will start to pay closer attention and may address their concerns with the government in either public or private. Regester and Larkin argue that mediation between the government and the media during this crucial stage could stifle some of the immediate backlash and negative press that often occurs during these situations.¹⁷ The issues of transparency versus cover-up are discussed throughout this paper. Owning the issue prior to it becoming a issue can go a long way to mitigate the negative impacts that can occur.

Stage three, “organization: current and crisis issue,”¹⁸ occurs when the issue comes to full fruition. The idea of “current” in this context is a situation that is playing out in the present. In

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Chase, S. (2011, Sept 19). *Top general vows to repay cost of using Ottawa's executive jet if he must*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/top-general-vows-to-repay-cost-of-using-ottawas-executive-jet-if-he-must/article594904/>

¹⁵ Boin, A., Hart, P., Stern, E., & Sundelius, B. (2005). P146

¹⁶ Regester, M. & Larkin, J. (1997).

¹⁷ Ibid. p51

¹⁸ Ibid. p52

this phase it becomes apparent to those involved the extremity of what is actually unfolding and that the government may slowly be losing control. Ultimately, this may lead to the issue turning from current to crisis.¹⁹ Once the issue hits the crisis situation, a government may be forced to change public policy, remove those who may be accountable from positions of authority or may divert funding towards the crisis as a response. This is where issues and crises can enter the policy making process and it means that government intervention and accountability are essential to calming the situation.

The final stage, according to Regester and Larkin, is what they refer to as “resolution: dormant issue.”²⁰ Stage four occurs only once the highest level of decision makers and government officials have noticed the crisis unfolding and have decided to take action. This may lead to senior officials usurping lower levels of government or taking over other portfolios. The stages as presented by Regester and Larkin provide a broad overview of the stages related to crisis management. By examining the relationship between the government and the stages of a crisis, as presented by Regester and Larkin, a review of the current practices of the Canadian Government can be conducted in order to determine their level of efficiency and effectiveness in their approach to crisis management.

Principle Components of Crisis Management

Crisis management is composed of a number of essential components which can mean the difference between “good” crisis management and “poor” decision making. How a government chooses to handle a situation and the steps that it takes in choosing to address an

¹⁹ Ibid. p53

²⁰ Regester, M. & Larkin, J. (1997). p54

emerging crisis could ultimately decide its political fate. Tench and Yeomans point to ten key principles that should be present in crisis management response, while this paper provides one additional point:

0. The anticipatory or preparatory pre-crisis phase
1. Define the real problem.
2. Centralise or at least control information flow.
3. Isolate a crisis team from daily business concerns.
4. Assume a worst-case planning position.
5. Do not fully depend on one individual.
6. Always resist the combative instinct.
7. Understand why the media are there.
8. Remember all constituents (stakeholders).
9. Contain the problem.
10. Recognise the value of short-term sacrifice²¹

There are a variety of reasons to adopt these principles as a response to an emergent crisis, however there is also a need to embrace proactive crisis management. For this reason, the addition of a “zero” point was added to the principles discussed by Tench and Yeomans. This “zero” point speaks to the preparatory planning phase of a crisis, as it is an essential part of mitigating the potential negative fallout of a crisis. Holistic approaches to planning and preparedness in the stages before a crisis occurs are necessary to prevent increased susceptibility to the crisis. These eleven principles should set the framework for the ideal management of crises within government. But, this is often not the case as governments choose to neglect certain principles in favour of avoiding issues or sidestepping responsibility in support of political successes.

The most important phase to effective and efficient crisis management is what occurs prior to the crisis even emerging. The anticipatory or preparatory pre-crisis phase is an integral part of good crisis management and the government should be adopting this early on. Secondly,

²¹Tench, R., & Yeomans, L. (2006). *Exploring public relations*. (p. 408). Essex, England: Pearson Education Ltd.

once the crisis emerges it becomes essential for government to stop and “define the real problem.”²² By defining the real problem early on government is often able to ensure that a crisis does not come to full fruition. An example of the defining the problem could be observed in the case of the 1998 Ice Storm²³, in that the problem was not the hazardous ice storm, but rather the affects that the ice had on electricity and the power-lines. In order to calm public concerns the government had to adopt the third step to “(c)entralise or at least control information flow.”²⁴Dispelling rumours or media stories, which only served to increase the public’s worries, was essential to the management of the crisis. Isolating “a crisis team from daily business concerns”²⁵ had to occur, as the Ontario and Quebec Hydro workers that generally worked on daily maintenance had to be re-routed to areas of concern versus normal maintenance.

During the 1998 Ice Storm, the government had to “(a)ssume a worst-case planning position.”²⁶ The government had to plan on the what-if scenario, if this were to last for a longer duration, what then? This idea of duration, leads us to the next point of “not fully depend on one individual.”²⁷ It became increasingly important for the government to ensure that not just one person was in-charge or responsible for the response to the crisis. The size and duration of the crisis meant that the government had to coordinate its response amongst a number of individuals.²⁸ While the government was coordinating and responding to these concerns they also had to ensure that they resisted “the combative instinct.”²⁹ This instinct can emerge when the government tries to defend its decisions. The most effective way for government to avoid the

²²Tench, R., & Yeomans, L. (2006). *Exploring public relations*. (p. 408). Essex, England: Pearson Education Ltd.

²³Lecomte, E., Pang, A., & Russell, J. (1999).

²⁴Tench, R., & Yeomans, L. (2006). p. 408

²⁵Ibid. p. 408

²⁶Ibid. p. 408

²⁷Ibid. p. 408

²⁸Lecomte, E., Pang, A., & Russell, J. (1999).

²⁹Tench, R., & Yeomans, L. (2006). p. 408

confrontational instinct was to ensure that they understood purpose of the media.³⁰ Due to the vast geographical impact of the Ice Storm and the variety of individuals and corporations impacted, the government had to ensure that during decision making it considered all of the concerns of stakeholders. Containment of the problem was achieved by focusing on the areas affected by the build up of ice, the government did not seek to respond in areas where the effects were not as severe.³¹ The government had to realise that there were instances in its response to the 1998 Ice Storm where it short-term sacrifice was in the best interest of long term recovery and response.³² This last point is often the most difficult, as often short term decisions are made as a quick reaction, which does not take into consideration the long-term negative impacts. This is often when the political may out-weigh the practical response to a crisis.

The Political Ramifications of Managing a Crisis

Politics in any situation adds another degree of complexity and requires a certain amount of finesse to curtail its affects. Crisis situations are no different and will require more attention from government to account for the political influence or outcome of an unfolding crisis. These various articles discuss elements that influence crisis situations, specifically the political element of crisis management within governments. These articles will collectively present the various concepts that have an impact, either positive or negative, on crisis management.

In their book, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, Boin and his colleagues provide an overview of crisis management in governments. Written between 2001 and 2005, this book seeks to examine the relationship between government and crises. By analyzing and providing relevant insight into the operations of various governing bodies, these authors are able to examine crisis

³⁰ Tench, R., & Yeomans, L. (2006). p. 408

³¹ Tench, R., & Yeomans, L. (2006). p. 408

³² Tench, R., & Yeomans, L. (2006). p. 408

management, communications, crisis framing and decision making. Their thesis is that “the strategic – as opposed to the tactical and operational – challenges for leaders in dealing with these threats are essentially the same: trying to prevent or at least to minimize the impact of adversity, deal with the social and political consequences, and restore public faith in the future.”³³ The authors continue on to provide some insight into how leadership can deal with crises, suggesting that leaders can best prepare for crises of the future by learning from their past experiences, as well as from others around them.³⁴

A government generally responds to a crisis through various responders, however Boin and his colleagues present a unique argument because their view of a crisis is not the hazardous situation or a natural/man-made disaster that it is often conceived of upon hearing this word. Rather “crisis,” in their opinion, refers to the systemic problems associated with not being able to cope with the onset of a disaster.³⁵ This is contrary to the common literature in this field as there is more of an onus on the government and leadership within government to be adaptable and prepared for situations. This line of thought might put the normality of government in jeopardy, rather than the operational response mechanism itself. Therefore, it may be necessary for the government to think outside of the proverbial box in order to identify potential crisis situations.

Boin and his colleagues argue that due to linear thinking, governments have been unable to determine potential crisis situations. Thinking non-linearly is required in order to identify potential threats.³⁶ The identification of the issues is only one factor of crisis management. Discussions of key concepts in crisis communication, crisis response and decision making that occur throughout *The Politics of Crisis Management* will be further explored below. The book

³³ Boin, A., Hart, P., Stern, E., & Sundelius, B. (2005). p4

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

provides concrete and comparative case studies that elaborate the complex and dynamic sections of crisis management in government, while establishing that leadership needed to engage the public and to make timely and effective decisions as they are imperative to good crisis management.

Crisis situations can provide government and organizations with the chance to learn. The time immediately after the onset of a crisis is pivotal for governments to learn and to adjust the way they choose to deal with crises in the future. There are a number of stakeholders when a crisis emerges and being able to coordinate and to communicate with the various actors in order to organize and create efficiencies is a daunting task. Public opinion is an important consideration, as framing or what Boin and his colleagues refer to as “meaning making” is essential to stifling fears, rumours, and uncertainty.³⁷ The public will be looking for answers and if they go unanswered or no justification is given, backlash on political figures can occur which is potentially detrimental to the recovery effort and to the political agendas of politicians.

The Politics of Crisis Management provides a keen awareness to the complexities of crises and presents a number of theoretical and practical recommendations for government and decision makers. ‘Decision maker’ is a loose term and refers to those bureaucrats who are at higher levels within the public service sector and have the power to influence decisions of government. Boin and his colleagues go on to expand on their key tasks of sense making, decision making, meaning making, terminating, and learning.³⁸ The last chapter makes various recommendations for each of the identified tasks which require government leadership in order to implement effective crisis management.

³⁷ Boin, A., Hart, P., Stern, E., & Sundelius, B. (2005).

³⁸ Ibid.

Comprehensive decision making is an important part of crisis management in the government. The article, “Crises and Crisis Management: Toward Comprehensive Government Decision Making” by Rosenthal and Kouzmin provide a five step process in order to determine how to manage a crisis. The authors also present administrative challenges which governments inherently face when dealing with a crisis.³⁹ Rosenthal and Kouzmin provide a unique definition of crisis which differs slightly from that used within the context of this paper. They view a crisis as “a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a social system, which—under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances—necessitates making critical decisions.”⁴⁰ This definition is different from that proposed by the Canadian Government in that it proposes the idea of making quick and critical decisions. The article takes aim at authors such as Quarentelli who view the government’s role in crisis situations as unimportant.⁴¹

One of the important reasons government must prepare for crises, as presented by Joanne Hale, Ronald Dulek and David Hale, is that governments will be susceptible to blame. This blame arises due to the public’s need for answers⁴² and as governments are generally expected to protect the people, they are often the first to receive this blame. Therefore, government ineffectiveness in response to crises becomes a predominant concern.⁴³ The second issue with governments in a crisis scenario is that they have no specific role and, due to this, they may make decisions which aggravate, rather than alleviate the situation.⁴⁴ Thirdly, they point to the idea that while governments may appear unified, with difficult choices come opposing views and

³⁹Rosenthal, U. & Kouzmin, A. (1997). Crises and crisis management: Toward comprehensive government decision making. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 7(2), 277-304. Retrieved from <http://jpart.oxfordjournals.org/content/7/2/277.full.pdf>

⁴⁰Ibid. pp280-281

⁴¹Ibid. pp286-287

⁴²Hale, J., Dulek, R., & Hale, D. (2005). Crisis response communication challenges: Building theory from qualitative data. *Journal of Business Communication*, 42(2), 112-134. Retrieved from <http://job.sagepub.com/content/42/2/112>

⁴³Rosenthal, U., & Kouzmin, A. (1997). p287

⁴⁴Ibid. p287

therefore a unified government is never a guarantee. Power relations may be susceptible to increased pressure, which may ultimately lead to restructuring.⁴⁵

The next relevant concern is whether the government is required to respond to a crisis or whether their response is reliant upon potential political gains. Politics should be secondary to the crisis response, however, in practice this is not usually the case. Rosenthal and Kouzmin provide five key questions which, with further exploration, could provide the basis for why governments choose to get involved in the first place: “Does a serious threat exist to the social-political system?”⁴⁶; is there a “(n)ecessity to respond to the threat”⁴⁷; what is “(t)he Necessity for Government Decisions”⁴⁸; what is the “(p)romptness of Decisions”⁴⁹; and the fifth area of inquiry examines the idea of an actual engagement or perceived engagement and whether critical decision should be made in a moment’s notice.⁵⁰ This last factor supports their definition of crisis.

The most important aspect of this article is that Rosenthal and Kouzmin provide a definition and basis for what can be considered an effective communications response to a crisis. These effective responses are derived from “decisional restraint, prudence, media consciousness and media management, open communications, and a long-term policy perspective.”⁵¹ Rosenthal and Kouzmin determine that these responses are more effective in actual crisis management.⁵²

The next article will look at new approaches to crisis management.

⁴⁵Ibid. p287

⁴⁶Rosenthal, U., & Kouzmin, A. (1997). p290.

⁴⁷Ibid. p291

⁴⁸Ibid. p292

⁴⁹Ibid. p293

⁵⁰Ibid. p295

⁵¹ Ibid. p295

⁵² Ibid. p295

In their article, “A New Approach to Crisis Management,” Robert & Lajtha argue that a new approach to the way that people and government respond to crisis is needed in order to find a more effective way of dealing with these events. Issues with the studies emerge, as they would not be confined to similarly developed countries, but would also include underdeveloped responses. What quantitative analysis can provide is information into the following variables: concern with security; concern with transparency; concern with value distortion; concern with justice/equity; and concern with authority.⁵³ If research were conducted to include these variables and questions were related to the above concerns, empirical data could be presented in order to determine the perceived effectiveness of government during crises. Robert and Lajtha also present two reasons for not selecting quantitative research methods: the first is that “(a)n appeal to scientific method/rigour is not always practicable in crisis situations”.⁵⁴ The second reason is that “(r)esearchers are rarely permitted to witness a crisis firsthand.”⁵⁵

1. **Reversing the polarity** – developing a positive polarity to crisis management/ looking at the positive attributes that investment in crisis management training can yield
2. **Reversing the priorities** – getting chief executives and top managers involved
3. **Managing a continuous process** - avoiding unnecessary and undesirable planning rigidity
4. **Challenging accepted practices** - questioning existing crisis management initiatives or the absence of a credible crisis management response capability
5. **Changing the focus** – paying more attention to the beginning and end of crises, where crisis management can be most effective
6. **Lateral thinking** – paying greater attention to what might initially appear to be marginal/ peripheral
7. **Addressing organisational taboos** – admitting the need for challenge and suggestion without recrimination.
8. **Building/rebuilding confidence** – re-instilling confidence/ trust in the organisation the core objective of crisis management
9. **Breaking inflexible mindsets** – training oneself to deal with the unexpected
10. **Developing a fresh approach** – moving towards a new language and practice of crisis management

Figure 1-Robert and Lajtha

Robert and Lajtha make an observation that there is an inadequacy of the traditional crisis management framework. For this reason they present ten suggestions for changing the old process of crisis management. These ten changes to traditional crisis management, as found in

⁵³Robert, B., & Lajtha, C. (2002). A new approach to crisis management. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 10(4), 181-191, p181. doi: 10.1111/1468-5973.00195/pdf

⁵⁴Ibid. p190

⁵⁵Ibid.

Figure 1, address many of the concerns raised by Rosenthal and Kouzmin. A number of the ten suggested changes relate to how the government communicates during crisis situations.

Communicating the issue at various levels of government, both internal to and external of the government becomes a concern. Reactive communications can be the difference between successful recovery post crises. The concept of how important crisis communication is during all stages of a crisis will be explored in the next segment of this paper.

Crisis Communication Imperatives

In planning for a crisis and when a crisis emerges, there are very few things more important to the government than establishing communications in which to deal with the crisis. Government leaders, elected officials and decision makers must consider both the known and the unknown, but beyond this leadership must consider viewpoints which may not be popular, or which are outside of conventional or traditional thinking.⁵⁶

Media-focusing events which occur and gain the attention of the public and of the government in a very short period of time can change the course of public debate and discussion. As information is released and as the public begins to understand the situation, political action begins and the government then feels the pressure to respond. Initially the response may be to try and cover up the crisis or to avoid answering any questions, but, the way government chooses to respond to these crisis situations can often shape the political discourse. This section examines the delicate processes of crisis communication in government by examining crisis communication in theory, while the next section will examine practical crisis communication.

Communication in the government is a complex machine. It is vital to implementing government policy and to the sustainability of a political party. Characteristics of good

⁵⁶ Boin, A., Hart, P., Stern, E., & Sundelius, B. (2005)

communication are presented in figure 1. Good crisis communication is needed, as it differs from regular government communications. Clarity and the ability to answer questions are vital to effective crisis communication efforts. In order to effectively understand this, crisis communication must be defined and imperatives must be drawn. There are a number of ways to define crisis and crisis communication, and depending on the field it can be defined differently. For example, healthcare professionals define crisis communications as: “The communications function...of addressing crisis, is to inform the public and health care practitioners and stakeholders on ways of mitigating the crisis, by reassuring and educating the public.”⁵⁷ The aim of crisis communication as presented by the Public Health Agency of Canada is: “to coordinate the flow of information and opinions to the target audiences in a way that maintains and restores the government’s credibility and integrity.”⁵⁸

These definitions and descriptions provide a clear idea of how the health sector views crisis communication, both before and after a crisis occurs. The way that Government perceives a crisis situation and how it seeks to calm the situation should be a priority before and during a crisis. There are a number of factors to consider regarding crisis communications, such as agenda setting, the media, public response, and intra/inter-governmental considerations. These factors culminate to become what government responses must react to. This section will provide insight into these various factors in order to clarify terms and to dispel common myths.

The first factor of consideration is agenda setting. Agenda setting is the ability for media to control public discourse and what is on the public agenda. If the agenda is not controlled by the government or the department/agency dealing with the crisis, the crisis can enlarge and

⁵⁷Laing, A. (2011). The h1n1 crisis: Roles played by government communicators, the public and media. *Journal of Professional Communication*, 1(1), 123-149. Retrieved from jpc.mcmaster.ca

⁵⁸Public Health Agency of Canada, The Audit Services Division. (2010). *Audit of crisis communication*. Retrieved from website: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/about_apropos/audit/2010/cc-eng.php

quickly go awry. The agenda is so important to control because, firstly, if the government is superseded in setting the public agenda by the media, then the repercussions could lead to public uncertainty during a crisis. Secondly, there is a distinct role for the media in crisis communications. Agenda setting and the media are intertwined as the media has an impact on setting the agenda. These are two essential concepts to consider, as the media and agenda can shift the outcome of a crisis situation.

There are a variety of other academic and expert opinions as to what should be involved in crisis communication, or as a process of crisis communication. For instance Joanne Hale, Ronald Dulek and David Hale discuss the ideas of observation, interpretation, choice, and dissemination as the continuum for crisis communications.⁵⁹ Each of those ideas can be broken down further. Observation is the practice of watching the crisis unfold and receiving the information that stems from it, otherwise known as collecting the facts for which the communication is based. Interpretation is the view that is taken when receiving the newly collected information. The choice allows for a certain amount of flexibility, as to how the information will be presented. Lastly, is the idea of dissemination or rather, the delivery of the message, which determines the way and by what means a message will be released to stakeholders.⁶⁰

There are a number of theories which emerge while researching the literature on crisis communication, but two are established as the most prevalent. The first is attribution theory while the second is image restoration theory.⁶¹ Attribution theory believes that “crises are exactly

⁵⁹Hale, J., Dulek, R., & Hale, D. (2005). Crisis response communication challenges: Building theory from qualitative data. *Journal of Business Communication*, 42(2), 112-134. Retrieved from <http://jcb.sagepub.com/content/42/2/112>

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Coombs, W. (2004). Impact of past crises on current crisis communication theory: Insights from situational crisis communication theory. *Journal of Business Communication*, 41(3), 265-289, p267. doi: 10.1177/0021943604265607

the type of event that will trigger attributions; crises are sudden and negative. It follows that people will make attributions about the cause of the crisis.⁶² This is the idea that if a crisis occurs, people will be looking to blame someone, be it an organization, the government or an individual who was involved in the incident. The department or agency which is closest to the incident will often take the burden of responsibility due to association. The second theory, image restoration theory,⁶³ as presented by William Benoit includes strategies in which governments or industries choose to counteract the negative stigmatization that may arise in a crisis. This is closely aligned to the idea of attribution theory because the attribution of blame needs to be mitigated and one way to do this is through various actions. Figure 2 presents some of the key strategies, characteristics and illustration of the various methods that may be employed by government in trying to re-establish their image. The importance of image restoration cannot be underestimated, the political process and importance of electoral success are contingent upon the public's perception of government. This could be seen by the public's

Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication

TABLE 1

Image Restoration Strategies

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Key Characteristic</i>	<i>Illustration</i>
<i>Denial</i>		
Simple Denial	Did Not Perform Act	Coke Does Not Charge McDonald's Less
Shift the Blame	Act Performed by Another	Exxon: Alaska and Caused Delay
<i>Evasion of Responsibility</i>		
Provocation	Responded to Act of Another	Firm Moved Because of New State Laws
Defeasibility	Lack of Information or Ability	Executive Not Told Meeting Changed
Accident	Act Was a Mishap	Sears' Unneeded Repairs Inadvertent
Good Intentions	Meant Well in Act	Sears: No Willful Over-Charges
<i>Reducing Offensiveness of Event</i>		
Bolstering	Stress Good Traits	Exxon's Swift and Competent Action
Minimization	Act Not Serious	Exxon: Few Animals Killed
Differentiation	Act Less Offensive	Sears: Preventative Maintenance
Transcendence	More Important Considerations	Helping Humans Justifies Tests
Attack Accuser	Reduce Credibility of Accuser	Pepsi: Coke Charges McDonald's Less
Compensation	Reimburse Victim	Disabled Movie-Goers Given Free Passes
<i>Corrective Action</i>	Plan to Solve or Prevent Problem	AT&T Promised to Improve Service
<i>Mortification</i>	Apologize for Act	AT&T Apologized

Figure 2-Benoit p179

discernment over the response of President George W. Bush in 2005 to hurricane Katrina.⁶⁴

Crisis communication as a response to natural disasters, technological disasters, media scrutiny or terrorist attacks are crucial in order to address concerns, provide clarification and to

⁶²Ibid. p267

⁶³Benoit, W. (1997). Image repair discourse and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 23(2), 177-186. doi:10.1016/S0363-8111(97)90023-0

⁶⁴ Waugh Jr., W. (2006). The political costs of failure in the Katrina and Rita disasters. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 604(1), 10-25. doi: 10.1177/0002716205284916

respond to public uncertainty and inquest. Therefore, crisis communication must be clear, truthful and quick in response to an emergent crisis situation, however this is often not the case. Taking into consideration both internal communications as well as external communications becomes a key responsibility of the lead institution. The communication within the government is as important as communication to the public and media. Both internal and external communications can have lasting effects on the response and recovery to a crisis situation, the leadership of government must therefore seriously consider its communication plan.

Summary of Theoretical Findings

The various articles and books have presented a discussion of elements that together form good crisis management. Factors such as: the principle components of good crisis management, the political influences that affect the management of crises and the imperative considerations of communication which government chooses to handle crises, are all important factors and determinants of good crises management decision making. It is therefore, important to understand how each of these affect the way government prepares for and responds to crises. Evaluation of government crisis management can effectively be done by examining these three areas from the perspective of stakeholders. The various authors who presented key ideas and arguments in this section have set the foundation for good crisis management and provided areas where government can improve. The next section examines a case study which will apply the various theories discussed above.

Case Study: Department of National Defence

The Canadian Forces, for a variety of reasons which will be discussed, are used in an assortment of ways as a mechanism of government response to crises. However, the Canadian

Forces have also been a source for crises over the years, due to the nature of their working environment and the innate argument over how the Canadian Forces should be used as a publicly funded organization. The case study will examine and compare two cases, the first being Afghanistan and the second Somalia.

Government Response to a Specific DND Communications Crisis

As a practical case study, the Government of Canada and their response to various crises within the Department of National Defence and their dealings with media scrutiny exemplify the importance of a strong communication strategy for the management of crisis. The response and communication strategy in this case will be explored in order to practically examine the government's reaction to a communications crisis. The case will examine allegations that the Canadian Government and the Department of National Defence were complicit or, at the very least, knew that torture of Afghanistan detainees was being conducted in order to gain information.

In order to elaborate and expand on this idea, comparisons between how the Canadian government handled the negative attention received by the Department of National Defence in the 1990s, over the Somalia affair and subsequent negative press in 2006 on the crisis surrounding the Afghan detainee issue. There are clear similarities in how the government dealt with both situations. The Afghan detainee issue was a crisis that needed to be dealt with in a thoughtful way in order for the Conservative government to dilute the negative attention from the public and from the media. The ability to manage crisis in a way which facilitates a return to "normal" is essential for governments. In particular, the Conservative government had to ensure a return to normalcy as it was a minority government and therefore, had to maintain things as they were so as not to attract extra negative attention from the opposition parties.

The case of the Afghani detainee event is complex as it contains a number of issues which will be examined throughout this section. The government communications involved with this case provide examples of the various factors mentioned previously in this paper. The Afghan detainee dilemma first emerged in 2006 under the Conservative government under Stephen Harper and became an issue that would plague the government over the next three years. Since 2005, the Canadian government facilitated the transfer of a few hundred prisoners to local authorities and, allegedly, were complicit in the torture of those prisoners. How the government responded to the crisis, the communications plan it acted upon and how it dealt with the media would be scrutinized, due to attribution theory, as well as for the government's responsibility over the actions of its departments. This section examines the various aspects of the Afghan detainee issue as it relates to crisis management within government. The first part seeks to examine the case in its entirety, while the next part examines what part communications had in response to this crisis situation. There are a variety of comparisons between theories and factors presented in previous sections of this paper, this case will be analysed as a crisis management study.

The controversy over the handling of detainees in Canadian prisons located in Afghanistan, emerged due to the transfer of those individuals to Afghani authorities, which would carry with it a degree of certainty that these detainees would be tortured. As a senior diplomat stated, "Afghan prisoners transferred by Canadians to local authorities in Kandahar were likely all tortured – while high-level officials in Ottawa looked the other way."⁶⁵ It is important to clarify that Canadian Forces personnel were not responsible for conducting the

⁶⁵Brennan, R., & Woods, A. (2009, November 19). Canada shamed on Afghan prisoner torture. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.thestar.com/printarticle/727879>

torture, however they were required to hand over any detainees to Afghan officials.⁶⁶ The fundamental issue with this process is that Canada is not a country which condones torture, let alone participates in facilitating it. Canada is a signatory to the Geneva Convention against the use of torture, which governs the treatment of prisoners of war. There are clear international implications for Canada, should it be determined that it allowed detainees to be tortured. The consequence of such allegations is that there is a perception that there are implied approvals for torture. Therefore, the Canadian government had to ensure that it could mitigate the affect that these associations would have on the government of the day.

The Conservative government had to act quickly in order to deter negative attention. Prime Minister Harper responded immediately by shuffling his cabinet in August 2007. The Honourable Peter Mackay was selected as the replacement for Gordon O'Connor in the role of the Minister for the Department of National Defence.⁶⁷ This change in Ministers was required in order to deal with the crisis in a serious tone. O'Connor was not as comfortable in dealing with the increased negative attention within the House of Commons. Peter McKay was a good choice, in that the media thought positively of him, he was an experienced Member of Parliament and had been the Minister for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. The reason that the government's response had to be so decisive was that public uncertainty over Afghanistan was becoming more prevalent: "While the Canadian public has rallied behind the newly empowered Canadian soldier and embraced a new sense of national pride, Canadian public opinion remains jittery about the future of Afghanistan."⁶⁸ While this did little to curtail

⁶⁶Moens , A. (2008). Afghanistan and the revolution in Canadian foreign policy. *Internal Journal*, 63(3), 569-586. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40204398>

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Moens , A. (2008). p580

the “jittery” future of public opinion of Afghanistan, at least it looked as though the government was taking action.

In order to mitigate the fallout from the detainee issue, the government denied and avoided the issue. As Moens states, “Some opposition politicians are trying to invoke the ghost of Abu Ghraib, even though Canadian forces do not run any such facility, as a public relations ploy to tarnish the government’s policy in Afghanistan.”⁶⁹ This argument was a slippery slope, had this comparison been drawn the government would have had greater difficulty in dealing with this crisis. The government initially halted the transfer of detainees, as the issue was not that Canadians were torturing them. Rather, it was the potential torture these detainees faced upon transfer to Afghani authorities. Ceasing the transfer of those prisoners until certainty could be achieved seemed like the appropriate measure to enact and was how the government chose to proceed in November of 2007.⁷⁰ But this was a temporary fix to a much larger issue. The government had to figure out a way to rebuild trust in the region and in the Canadian public. In the immediate moment, the Canadian government chose to install video cameras in Afghani interrogation cells. The government established that this was a reasonable way in which to compromise on the commitment to not facilitate the torture of prisoners. In February 2008, the government decided to resume the practice of transferring detainees to Afghani authorities.⁷¹

This may have provided a solution to the lack of trust in the region and may have eased some concerns in the public, however, there were still a variety of questions and criticisms of how detainees were treated and what the government did to prevent ill treatment. The Military Police Complaints Commission implemented a public interest investigation into the action of

⁶⁹Ibid. p580

⁷⁰Shah, N. (2010). U.S. monitoring of detainee transfers in Afghanistan: International standards and lessons from the UK & Canada. *Human Rights Institute/ Columbia Law School*, p15. Retrieved from available at SSRN: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1728888

⁷¹Shah, N. (2010). p15

Military Police Officers and their transfer of detainees. When the investigation began on February 9, 2007, it looked to examine the specific cases of three detainees who alleged that they are tortured when they were transferred to Afghan authorities. The investigation sought expert opinion, and examined evidence and testimony from senior diplomats. However, the investigation was unable to get the relevant information that it required to make a determination. In March 2008, the Chair of the investigation recommended that the inquiry change its approach to a public hearing. This was largely due to government road blocks such as the redaction of documents and not allowing government officials to speak openly about what occurred.⁷²

The government was against a move from an investigation to a public hearing, as the public hearing carried with it further legal powers. The government had to react to this and did so by legally challenging the decision:⁷³ “On September 16, 2009, the Federal Court of Canada ruled that the Commission did not have jurisdiction to investigate the ‘transfer complaints’ but did have jurisdiction to investigate the ‘failure to investigate complaint.’”⁷⁴ What this meant was that the military police had a responsibility to investigate the allegations in a reasonable time. The Military Police Complaints Commission received a complaint which did not support the reasonable timeframe requirement. The initial interest of the government was to remove this from public discourse, however, this was no longer an option as a public hearing would bring the detainee issue to the forefront.

This reaction led to a variety of issues that presented a multifaceted response by government to this emerging crisis. The government had to decide on a course of action in which to proceed, as now the case was open to public scrutiny. By this time the emerging situation was

⁷²Military Policy Complaints Commission, Parliament of Canada. (2011). *Afghanistan public interest hearing (APIH)*. Retrieved from website: <http://www.mpcc-cppm.gc.ca/300/afghan/index-eng.aspx>

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Military Policy Complaints Commission, Parliament of Canada. (2011).

picked up by the media and was set in the agenda. The first option the government had, which is the typical response of any government, corporation or individual was to deny the allegations. If the government denied until someone believed them, then they may have been able to persuade the public that they were innocent of any wrong doing. The second course of action was to block the proceedings to the best of the government's ability, through practices which it had employed earlier, redactions, and making it difficult for bureaucrats to express their knowledge of any wrong-doing. As was the case with senior diplomat Richard Colvin:

(t)he Conservative government quietly argued in Federal Court last week that the final report should exclude evidence from witnesses like Richard Colvin. The former Afghanistan-based diplomat rocked the political world in November 2009 when he first testified at a Commons committee that his superiors ignored his repeated warnings that detainees Canadian soldiers transferred into Afghan custody faced serious risk of torture.⁷⁵

This clearly presented the stance that the government adopted. It wanted to control the information which was presented in both the investigation and ultimately what message was released to the public. Even to go as far as attacking the credibility of the individual presenting the information: "A day after a former diplomat made explosive allegations that Ottawa was aware of routine torture practices in Afghanistan, the Conservatives attacked his credibility, saying there was 'no evidence' to support the claims."⁷⁶

Lastly, the government had the option to be transparent in hopes that they would have been found non-culpable and that they acted in a way which reflected the positive values and ethics of Canada. This method does not go without risks. If the government reveals everything

⁷⁵Smith, J. (2011, April 05). Conservatives seek to limit findings of afghan torture report. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/article/969056--conservatives-seek-to-limit-findings-of-afghan-torture-report>

⁷⁶CTV News Staff. (2009, November 19). Mackay says allegations in torture scandal 'ridiculous'. *CTV News*. Retrieved from http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/TopStories/20091119/afghan_torture_091119/

and is found at fault they will take the full impact of the public's outrage and subsequently any punishment decided by the judicial and legislative branches of government. In order to deem this option as unviable, it is important to consider the context in which this all unfolded. The Conservative government had a minority government at the time, which meant that an election could be called at any point, as such the Conservative wanted to ensure a positive outcome to an election. A scandal demonstrating that the government was complicit in handing detainees over to Afghan authorities, would negatively affect the public trust and perception of the government. Ultimately this would hinder the chances of the government being re-elected, let alone re-elected as a majority in the House of Commons. In this particular case, the Privy Council Office of the government had assessed in a presentation that "a perception of cover-up and a lack of openness and transparency,"⁷⁷ was going to be a factor in how it reacted to the crisis. Furthermore, the same government document said that the "government needed to 'regain control' of the issue and 'stick to its story.'"⁷⁸

In this case, the government decided to take a multi-layered approach and employ strategies from the image restoration theory in order to deal with the situation. As mentioned previously, their initial response was to deny any wrong doing which is standard for most, if not all crisis situations where fault can be placed. Secondly the government decided to respond by bringing media savvy and experienced Members of Parliament in to take over the Department. Thirdly, once the government determined that the initial information carried more validity and weight, it decided to bring in legal protection by utilizing the Department of Justice.

⁷⁷CBC News. (2010, March 10). Tories focused on message as detainee issue grew. *CBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2010/03/09/afghan-detainee-communication-plan-presentation.html>

⁷⁸CBC News. (2010, March 10).

The second to last step, which the Conservative government adopted as a response, is the idea that once there is no wrong-doing found and the government is clear from any legal or moral responsibility, the government seeks to infuse the media and public discussion with the news that they were not culpable for any misconduct. As was the case in the findings by the public hearing: “As a result of its investigation, the Commission determined that the three Afghan detainees in question were well-treated by the CF military police at KAF: the detainees’ personal effects were properly handled and inventoried and the detainees were afforded prompt and appropriate medical treatment.”⁷⁹ The government tends to over communicate to the media specific information which proves its innocence. In this case “(t)he Harper government, however, declared the process ‘over’ and quickly dispatched ministers ... to trumpet the fact that no records had been found suggesting Canadian soldiers knowingly transferred prisoners to torture at the hands of Afghan jailers.”⁸⁰

Finally, the government intended to change the way in which it was being perceived. If the Conservative government had to endure public and parliamentary scrutiny, yet was found not responsible for any transgressions, the blame needed to shift to the parliament’s opposition parties in order to illicit a positive return on what could have been a detrimental situation. The Conservatives determined a way to do this, through declaring the high costs associated with an investigation and a hearing of this size: “The Conservatives said the process of unearthing and scrutinizing the documents cost taxpayers \$12-million, suggesting that any more probing would

⁷⁹Military Policy Complaints Commission, Parliament of Canada. (2011). *Afghanistan public interest investigation (APII)*. Retrieved from website: <http://www.mpcc-cppm.gc.ca/300/afghanistan/index-eng.aspx>

⁸⁰Chase, S., & Curry, B. (2011, June 22). 4,000 pages on Afghan detainees leave question of torture unanswered. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/4000-pages-on-afghan-detainees-leave-question-of-torture-unanswered/article2071291/>

be fruitless.”⁸¹ Ultimately the issue died down as Prime Minister Harper prorogued parliament, which dissolved the inquiry into the transfer of detainees: “Accountability seems elusive with the Harper government taking proactive measures to ensure the issue is marginalized. By proroguing Parliament from late December 2009 until 3 March 2010, the government shut down the joint House of Commons committee investigating the detainee matter.”⁸²

The need to curtail the negative press associated with the transfer of detainees to countries that were complicit in torture, may have stemmed from the likeness of historical misdeeds of the Canadian Forces. The Canadian Forces should have known this as historical evidence has shown that the way government chooses to respond to a situation has lasting implications. The “dark ages” of the Canadian Forces in the 1990s may have played a role in the government response to 2006. The Somalia affair was a case in which the Canadian Forces was considered culpable in the murder of a Somalian individual.

Similarities between the incidents concerning Afghanistan and Somalia can be drawn, as there was a high degree of public and media scrutiny, and officials struggled with the idea of transparency.⁸³ At the time, this caused the Liberal government a lot of negative press as the military was perceived as unaccountable and unprofessional.⁸⁴

Worse yet, the public perception and image from the events which occurred, was that of

profoundly disturbing visual images of torture and degradation,
documented instances of the army's chain of command encouraging
the torture at worst and turning a blind eye to it at best, and

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Gionet, M. (2009). Canada the failed protector: Transfer of Canadian captured detainees to third parties in Afghanistan. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 29, 1-14. Retrieved from <http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/view/15229/20303>

⁸³Dawson, G. (2008). Success in failed states: Canadian Military Strategy in Somalia and the Implications for Afghanistan*. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 28(Winter), 33-48, p38. Retrieved from <http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/jcs/article/view/11245/16301>

⁸⁴Ibid. p38

disturbing official attempts to destroy or suppress important documents relating to the events.⁸⁵

This inability to gain control over the situation and to foster any positive media attention in the Somalia affair, led to the mission's public perception as being that of a failure.⁸⁶

Crisis communication and management in both of these cases was pivotal in gaining the necessary support that a government requires in a time of conflict. If a conflict is determined a failure by the public, no amount of positive outcomes can counteract the negative perception. This will ultimately have negative repercussion on the government and may lead to the government being unsuccessful in their next election. Therefore, the message that is presented to the public, media, and stakeholders must account for error and present a method for correcting the situation. By utilizing an image restoration strategy the government may have been able to deflect or shift the negative attention.

Case Summary

The Canadian Forces as a case study provided a distinct examination into the communications crisis which emerged as a result of the government incorrectly addressing an emerging situation. The communication imperatives required to respond to a crisis were identified and applied to this case. The crisis presented itself as a result of the way Canadian Forces handled foreign militants. Attribution theory and image restoration theory allows for an explanation of how the government responded in these situations. The government has a responsibility to the public and stakeholders to provide truthful, relevant and accurate

⁸⁵Razack, S. (2000). From the "clean snows of Petawawa": The violence of Canadian peacekeepers in Somalia. *Cultural Anthropology*, 15(1), 127-163, p128. doi: 10.1525/can.2000.15.1.127

⁸⁶Dawson, G. (2008). p38

information in response to a crisis. The case studies examined, provide a unique and useful insight in the practice of government in a crisis situation. There are a variety of factors which emerge in crisis situations and the media is a key element of the strategy that the government chooses to employ as a response to emerging crisis.

The initial strategy of the government, to cover-up the situation, was an error of the department and government as this only led to further media and public scrutiny. As Register and Larkin discuss mediation between the government and the media could have proved beneficial in stifling some of the immediate backlash and negative press that occurred during this situation.⁸⁷ Had the government chosen to address the issue in its infancy, the response to the unfolding crisis would likely have led to a more positive outcome. The government emerged from the incident unscathed as it was found not responsible for the subsequent torture of detainees. If the government had been found responsible, the likelihood of electoral success would have been unlikely. Strategic planning by the Prime Minister in proroguing parliament until the issue dissipated, also influenced the positive turn of events.

The case of the Canadian Forces provides a perspective as to how the various topic areas of crisis management are applied in a practical sense. A poor application of the principles of crisis management, which were discussed earlier in the paper, as well as the influence of politics on the decision making process and the communications that were enacted in order to curtail negative perceptions of government response led to a poorly managed crisis. There is a correlation between the stages that Register and Larkin present and this case study, the case demonstrates that the Canadian Government is currently inefficient in its approach to crisis management.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p51

Conclusion

This paper has examined a number of elements as they relate to crisis management principles, politics and communication. The research has examined current Canadian Government crisis management mechanisms, in order to evaluate their effectiveness once applied to a crisis situation. Additionally, the paper has sought to evaluate the current crisis management mechanisms of government and why they chose to make certain decisions in times of crisis. By doing so there are clear issues with how the government chose to approach their crises. On one hand there is tendency for government to try and hide an emerging issue and on the other the government is supposed to be open and transparent.

As crises continue to occur on the national and international stage the government must be prepared to deal with these situations. Crisis management should therefore be a priority of the government. The government must be able to determine what is considered good (efficient and effective) and poor crisis management. This paper sought to identify principle components of effective crises management and communications, in the hopes of closing some of the identified gaps.

Crisis management and reassurance via good crisis management are paramount to an effective and efficient government. Communications in government is an important element of the day-to-day actions of a government, how a government chooses to interact with the public and the message that they choose to disseminate may affect the political discourse and public debate surrounding a crisis. As seen in the case study when faced with media scrutiny it is often better to face it directly, rather than attempting to conceal the situation. Therefore, the need to be extra vigilant and careful in the message presented in a time of crisis is essential. Crisis communication is one of the most important aspects of crisis management and is a primary

responsibility of government at all levels. The government should seek to be proactive in its crisis communications plans, as “(v)iewing crisis communication merely as a retrospective process for rekindling the status quo fails to account for the multifaceted role of communication in crisis planning and recovery.”⁸⁸

Crises will undoubtedly direct the political agenda of a governing body. Proper crisis management is a necessity if a government is seeking to prolong its political mandate. If there is a lack of understanding in how to deal with the situation it can lead to further difficulties in mitigating the effects of a crisis on the political scene. In recent years the Government of Canada has become good at dealing with image restoration and the various strategies employed to deal with it. But there are still areas for improvement upon crisis management in order to avoid quick and ineffective reactions in response to crises. If a government is inept at controlling a crisis, they will eventually face a crisis of electoral success. Quarentelli states that “just as the military finds it possible to advance tactical principles in addition to strategical principles, disaster researchers can point to some of the tactical considerations which are involved in effective and efficient crisis management.”⁸⁹ Identifying these tactical considerations as a means of preparedness can go a long way to assisting the government in becoming efficient at the management of crises.

Recommendations

The journal articles and books presented in this paper provide an ideal context for crisis management within a government. The importance of a positive image in regards to the public’s

⁸⁸Sellnow, T., & Seeger, M. (2001). Exploring the boundaries of crisis communication: The case of the 1997 Red River valley flood. *Communication Studies*, 52(2), 153-167, p166.
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10510970109388549>

⁸⁹Quarentelli, E. L. (1988). Disaster crisis management: A summary of research findings. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25(4), 373-385, p375. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6486.1988.tb00043.x

perception of a government is essential to electoral success and therefore, preparation and mitigation of crises which could affect that image is necessary. The evaluation of the government's current policy on crisis management is essential to determine what changes, if any, are necessary. In conclusion, government officials have frequently been unsuccessful in their attempt to adequately address the media and public during crisis situations. This has led to public mistrust, the perception of unaccountability and lack of control over what happens during times of crises, whether they are domestic or international. Comparisons can be drawn over historical crisis management, as well as more recent cases and how the government chose to handle those responses as was the case with the Somalia affair and the Afghan detainee issue. There have been a variety of lessons enunciated throughout this paper. Such as: how to respond to a crisis, when to address the situation, as well as a discussion surrounding the various complex issues which emerge as a result of crisis situations.

A practical analysis has been able to determine that both a multifaceted and multilayered response to crisis situations is required for effective crisis management. It is not only what happens at the forefront of a response which determines a successful response to crises, but also what happens in the background. This supports the idea that anticipatory and 360° preparedness planning, by all levels of government, will assist in the mitigation of negative outcomes post-crisis. In the case of the Afghan detainee crisis, the Prime Minister, Privy Council Office, Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and various levels of bureaucrats came together in order to address the unfolding crisis and to present a message which defended the government's handling of the affair. But this was only done after increased pressure from the media and public.

The theoretical research has been able to locate and analyse articles that have provided insight into how the government of Canada conducts crisis management. Rosenthal's perspective on a comprehensive government approach to crisis management is important for government to understand and to adopt. Robert's idea of where government needs to move in order to become efficient and effective at crisis management is essential. A common theme emerges in the study of effective crisis management; the government cannot afford to lose the public's trust during a crisis situation.

If confidence and trust are lost during an emergency period this can lead to an even greater crisis, that of a lack of confidence in the authorities.⁹⁰ In accordance with this theme of a lack of trust, is the concept that if the government is not seen to be looking after the public's best interest, confidence can also be lost.⁹¹ This is usually a result of a public perception that the government is seeking to preserve its own political position and power.⁹² This is supported by Rosenthal's assertion that "when crisis manifests itself, local officials may be fully subordinate to strong politicians with nationwide and, increasingly, CNN-sought appeal."⁹³

This means that crisis management in a government must be able to satisfy both the political and public requirement. This juxtaposition between public and politic is going to be one aspect that requires more in-depth research. The various authors each present different perspectives with regards to government crisis management. However, each of them seems to include, to some extent, this same dilemma of public versus politic. Therefore, a government will have to reconsider the public/political debate, during their own political agenda.

⁹⁰Robert, B., &Lajtha, C. (2002). p181

⁹¹Ibid. p183

⁹²Ibid. p183

⁹³Ibid. p288

Crisis situations typically elicit uncertainty and fear as the initial reactions from the public. This may cause the public to begin engaging in political action, which the government then feels pressured to respond. At this stage there is potential for rash decision making largely due to public pleas for action. Governments need to be able to address concerns and public inquiry, but must stave off the all too tempting quick reaction. Initially the response may be to try and cover up the crisis or to overreact to it, both of which ultimately cost more time and money. Government decisions at this stage are pivotal in crises situations and they can have lasting effects on post-crisis recovery.

Good crisis management can actually assist the government, as much as it draws attention and scrutiny from the public and media, the government is also made aware of critical gaps in its planning and preparation otherwise known as what Boin, Hart, Stern and Sundelius call “Crises induced learning.”⁹⁴ The impact of poor planning can be profound and can have detrimental effects on all levels of government. The PCO and PMO as central agencies, are determined to ensure the continued success of government institutions and of the Government.

By expanding on Regester and Larkin’s six step process for effective crisis management planning, this paper recommends that firstly, the government adopt a 360° approach to preparedness planning. Secondly, non-traditional thinking is necessary when planning for crises, although, this non-traditional thinking is necessary, the government should not stray too far from the realities of what may occur. Third, is a need for a holistic approach to crisis management planning and response, which includes inter-departmental and intra-departmental planning, while also considering public private partnerships. The fourth requires that the government considers anticipatory planning, which should include creating policies that are proactive and deal with preventing the crises from occurring in the first place. Fifth, is the idea that a specific strategy

⁹⁴ Boin, A., Hart, P., Stern, E., & Sundelius, B. (2005)

should be in place for each specific crisis that may occur. In the sixth step, the creation of an impact analysis is necessary in order to determine who may be affected by the potential crises.

The seventh step requires the government to instil an effective communications plan, which takes into consideration the impact analysis, as well as newly drafted policies. The eighth and final step is that it will be necessary to test the newly developed plans on an annual basis. In testing, inefficiencies or flaws can be identified and addressed within a controlled environment.

Additionally, the effectiveness of policies and plans can also be identified.⁹⁵ By adopting these practices/principles for planning, the government could resolve a number of issues that may arise as a result of an emergency or crisis.

The operational element of crisis management is not the only area that needs attention: there is a requirement to also consider strategic changes to how government chooses to address crisis management. The ability to plan and coordinate the communications of government in a way which elicits trust, calms worries, and responds to and addresses media inquiries can make the difference in a crisis. The difficulty is being able to do this while not losing political support and electoral success. This juxtaposition is what often causes government to act in the way they do. Anticipation, coordination, preparedness, and planning are all essential elements of good crisis management. Strong planning on the side of government will go a long way to mitigate the negative effects that crises may have on loss to life, property, finances or political sustainability.

⁹⁵ Regester, M. & Larkin, J. (1997). P174

These eight steps were adapted from Regester and Larkin's original six steps of crisis management.

MEMORANDUM FROM THE PCO/PMO TO THE DEPUTY MINISTERS**FOR CONSIDERATION****SUBJECT**

Recommendations for Government Crises Management Preparedness

SUMMARY

This briefing note provides information for Deputy Ministers and deputy heads as to how they can best prepare for crises situations. Anticipatory and strong preparedness which takes a 360° examination of surroundings will assist in the mitigation of potential political and operational downfalls. The elected government as well as bureaucratic institutions are susceptible to crises and therefore, it is essential for government to be prepared. This memo serves as a checklist to guide you in preparing your departments/agencies for crises.

BACKGROUND

Departments are the instruments through which the government implements its policy they are therefore, susceptible to changes in government policy and direction. A greater degree of preparedness when dealing with crises is essential to sustainable government and departmental continuity planning. In order to accomplish this, a holistic approach to crises management is needed which combines both intra-departmental and inter-departmental responses. Holistic crisis management becomes a whole-of-government approach to crises preparedness and response.

There are subtle, yet important nuances between each of the terms below which need to be defined:

Crisis: a situation that somehow challenges the public's sense of appropriateness, tradition, values, safety, security or the integrity of the government.

Emergency: an abnormal situation that requires prompt action, beyond normal procedures, in order to limit damage to persons, property or the environment.

Crisis management: to prevent injury or loss of life, to help limit damage to assets and property, to help maintain public services, to assist in the process of recovery, and to help maintain or restore public confidence in the government.

CURRENT SITUATION

The current direction from the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) is that Departments “must recognize that extraordinary and rapid efforts may be required in times of crisis or emergency. They must be prepared to adjust priorities and resources accordingly. The necessary plans, partnerships, tools and methods must be in place to allow government officials to communicate effectively and efficiently in both official languages during an emergency or a crisis.”

Although TBS speaks to the various elements of crisis management that are necessary for a favourable outcome, post-crisis, emphasis on anticipatory and planned crises response should be placed at the forefront of good crises management.

By examining current government planning in an attempt to mitigate the outcome of a poorly managed crisis situation, there is an identified need to change the way departments are choosing to prepare for crisis.

The recommended current crisis management principles are:

0. The anticipatory or preparatory pre-crisis phase.
 1. Defining the real problem.
 2. Centralising or at least controlling information flow.
 3. Isolating a crisis team from daily business concerns.
 4. Assuming a worst-case planning position.
 5. Not fully depending on one individual.
 6. Always resisting the combative instinct.
 7. Understanding why the media are there.
 8. Remembering all constituents (stakeholders).
 9. Containing the problem.
 10. Recognising the value of short-term sacrifice⁹⁶

STRATEGIC ACTION

The following are a list of strategic actions that departmental Deputy Ministers (DM) and deputy heads should take into account when considering the anticipatory or preparatory pre-crisis principle of crisis management (point “zero”):

- A 360° approach to preparedness planning, non-traditional thinking is necessary when planning for crises, although non-traditional thinking is necessary, do not stray too far from the realities of what may occur.

⁹⁶Tench, R., & Yeomans, L. (2006). *Exploring public relations*. (p. 408). Essex, England: Pearson Education Ltd.

- A holistic approach to crisis management planning and response, inter-departmental and intra-departmental planning, while also considering public private partnerships.
- Crisis management in the government must be able to satisfy both the political and public requirement.
- Anticipatory planning should include creating policies which are proactive and deal with preventing the crises from occurring in the first place.
- Specific strategies should be in place for each specific crisis that may occur.
- Creating an impact analysis as to whom may be affected by the potential crises that are identified.
- Instilling an effective communications plan which takes into consideration the impact analysis, as well as newly developed policies.
- It will be important to test the newly developed plans on an annual basis. In testing, inefficiencies or flaws can be identified and addressed within a controlled environment. Additionally, the effectiveness of policies and plans can also be identified.

IMPACT

The impact of poor planning can be profound and may have detrimental effects on all levels of government. The PCO and PMO as central agencies are determined to ensure the continued success of government institutions and of the Government. Therefore, departments must ensure that they consider implementing new policies and guideline in order to prepare for crises situations and any potential negative implications. Media and public attention will also have to be considered an area of impact during and after a crisis.

NEXT STEPS

DMs and deputy heads, should consider how their department/agency can be used in response to a crisis, as well as how it can better prepare for a crisis situation using the anticipatory and holistic approaches to good crises management. These new approaches should be drafted and presented to the PCO and PMO at the next DM meeting.

CONCLUSION

Anticipation, coordination, preparedness, and planning are all essential elements of good crisis management. As the leads within your departments it is important that you have a strong 360° plan in place to deal with crises when they arise. A holistic plan, which considers all possibilities, will go a long way to mitigate the negative effects that crises may have on loss to life, property, finances or political sustainability.

Clerk of the Privy Council

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