

Organizational cultural barriers and roles of organizational learning in crisis management: an integrated model

Maisoon Abo-Murad*, Rossilah Jamil

International Business School, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia – Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to develop a conceptual model that provides an integrated understanding of organizational cultural barriers on crisis management practices, and subsequently emphasizes the role of organizational learning in overcoming those barriers. This paper draws on the literatures of crisis management, organizational culture and organizational learning. Organizational culture has been considered a decisive factor for effective crisis management. There is an agreement in the literature that organizational learning aids in full cultural change by transforming the values, core beliefs assumptions of organizational members to result sustainable practices. Analysis of the literature reveals that the existing knowledge on the subject has fallen short in at least three areas. Based on these gaps, the authors proposed an integrated model for organizational cultural barriers to crisis management. The conceptual model, is hoped, will allow a holistic understanding of the interplay of cultural barriers throughout the stages of crisis, and highlights the roles of organizational learning in creating an effective management system in organizations. The paper offers both researchers and practitioners with guidelines to understand the influence of organizational culture on crisis management practices, roles of organizational learning, as well as identification of areas for future research.

Key words: Crisis management; Organizational culture; Organizational learning; Cultural barrier

1. Introduction

Crises are inevitable (Perrow, 1984; Fink, 1986; Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992; Shrivastava, 1993; Pearson and Mitroff, 1993; Pearson and Clair, 1998; Robert and Lajtha, 2002; Veil, 2011; James et al., 2011; Hilliard et al., 2011; Lagadaec and Topper, 2012; Coombs, 2012; Crandall et al., 2013; AlBattat and MatSom, 2014). In the past dozen years, the world has witnessed a rapid growth in the number, complexity, and scope of crises. Man-made crises such as: terrorist attack, kidnapping, employees strike, product contamination and product recall; and natural disaster such as, earthquakes, typhoons, volcanoes and tsunami; are some examples of growing threats that affect all individuals. Some crises may have significant effect on an organization's property, workforce and business operations, while some others could threaten the whole existence of any organization (Coombs, 2012).

Due to that, it becomes pertinent for organizations to manage crisis in order to protect themselves from expected and unexpected crises. Crisis management is defined as a "systematic attempt by organizational members with external stakeholders to avert crises or to effectively manage those that do occur" (Pearson and Clair, 1998: 61). The importance of crisis management is manifold. Firstly, crisis management enables organizations to save lives, properties, health and environment

through effective crisis management practices (Coombs, 2012). Secondly, crisis management ensures sustainable development since some crises can threaten the whole existence of any organization (Shrivastava, 1993; Robert and Lajtha, 2002). Hence, the manner in which organizations plan, take proactive actions and react to crisis is critical.

In spite of this, unfortunately literature shows that top management have not paid enough attention to crisis management (Pearson and Clair, 1998; Fowler et al, 2007; Crandall et al., 2013). Their imperceptions to crisis management results in unwillingness to allocate necessary resources for initiating and adopting crisis management program (Penrose, 2000; Fowler et al., 2007). Furthermore, inappropriate organizational culture also plays a decisive role in resisting crisis management practices (Smith, 1990; Spillan, 2003; Veil, 2011). Research done by Mitroff and Alpasian, (2003) found that only 5% to 25% of organizations are crisis prepared, while 75% to 95% of all organizations are unprepared and prone to crises.

Top management perception and organizational culture found to be the most important factors for crisis management (Smith, 1990; Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992; Stead and Smallman, 1999; Mitroff and Anagnos, 2001; Legadac and Topper, 2012). Furthermore they are related to each other. Top management perception is a result of managers' beliefs and basic assumptions which in turn rooted in their organizational culture. On the other side managers' beliefs, attitudes and behaviors can also

* Corresponding Author.

influence organizational culture by employing their behaviors in organizational daily activities, which will validate these actions and make it imbedded in their culture. If managers deny crises, this will be reflected in their behaviour and hence create a culture of crisis in their organizations (Richardson, 1995; Liu et al., 2009; James et al., 2011).

The influence of organizational culture on crisis management practices is still insubstantial and has not been fully addressed. Numerous studies have recommended giving additional weight for organizational culture in crisis studies (Smallman and Weir, 1999; Stead and Smallman, 1999; Veil, 2011; James et al., 2011). Veil (2011) called for further research into the organizational cultural barriers which lead to a crisis. Present studies on crisis are fragmented which prevents consensus understanding or agreement on a common research paradigm (James et al., 2011: 457). This fragmentation is due to the multiple disciplines which have involved in crisis research. Culture studies on the context of crisis management as well lack adequate integration with one another. Former studies dealt with a subset of this issue. It dealt with either preparing organizational culture for crisis (Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992; Veil, 2011) or attaining the cultural readjustment and alignment after the crisis happened (Turner, 1976; Smith and Elliott, 2007). For that reason this paper intends to fill this gap in the literature by offering a conceptual framework that presents the organizational cultural barriers to crisis management practice throughout all crisis stages.

Most researches on organizational learning and crisis have focused on post crisis learning (e.g. Fink, 1986; Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt, 1996; Mitroff, 2005; Jaques, 2007). Based on this premise, the organizational cultural change would only occur through post crisis learning. However, if the culture of the organization embraces learning throughout the crisis cycle, and particularly in the pre-crisis stage, cultural adjustment would be an on-going process. Accordingly, the opportunity to learn exists throughout the crisis cycle (Veil, 2011). Veil (2011) and Lagadec and Tropper, (2012) called for further research to enhance learning throughout the crisis cycle, not just after crisis occurs. To do so and fill this gap, the Senge's model of organizational learning (Senge, 1990) is highly potential to be used as a guiding framework for learning in the context of crisis management. The model enables focusing on the various macro and micro forces embedded in the organizational culture and making learning part of the organizational culture for barriers to be acknowledged and handled.

This paper aims to provide a modest contribution to the field of crisis management. First, to propose a conceptual model that shows the organizational cultural barriers for crisis management practices. Second, this article intends to highlight the role of organizational learning in overcoming those barriers. To do so, this paper will focus on Jaques' model for crisis management (Jaques, 2007; 2010)

and Senge's model for organizational learning (Senge, 1990) as the main guiding frameworks.

2. Crisis management

The notion of crisis management recalls several imaginations in our minds. It may invoke organizational activities that seek to prevent and face multitude of threats like natural disasters and, technology breakdown. Crisis management is defined as a "systematic attempt by organizational members with external stakeholders to avert crises or to effectively manage those that do occur" (Pearson and Clair, 1998: 66). This definition reveals that crisis management entails the ability to address effectively two sets of organizational activities. The first set is a collection of proactive activities for preventing crisis which combine early sign detection, planning preparation, and prevention activities. The second set consists of reactive activities given that the nature of crises which are often inevitable and unavoidable (Fink, 1986; Mitroff et al., 1988; Mitroff, 2005; Coombs, 2012), so it entails the activities that mitigate and lessen the crisis effects through damage containment and recovery activities.

Having said that crisis management consists of both proactive and reactive activities. The traditional approach has largely focused on the reactive activities which are crisis response and recovery activities (Jaques, 2007). This approach sets crisis management structurally in conjunction with operational or technical functions with less attention given to proactive activities. Only in the recent years the literature on crisis management has taken a remarkable turn towards a more proactive approach (eg. Robert and Lajtha, 2002; Jaques, 2007; Roux-Dufort, 2007). This change is due to the drastic changes in the nature of crisis both in number and complexity (Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992; Pearson and Clair, 1998; Robert and Lajtha, 2002; Roux-Dufort, 2007). Crisis management practice has shifted from merely concentrating on event management approach to process management approach (Jaques, 2007; Roux-Doufort, 2007). This shift signifies that crisis management now concerns more about building organizational capabilities and skills, which in turn offers the ability and flexibility to confront uncertainties, dynamics and complexity of situations rather than execution of rigid planning and standard procedures (Shrivastava, 1993; Robert and Lajtha, 2002; Mitroff et al., 2004). Furthermore while the traditional approach to manage crisis focuses on public relations, the new trend goes further to incorporate system oriented approach (Shrivastava, 1993; Robert and Lajtha, 2002; Roux-Dufort, 2007), where crisis management is considered as "fresh vision" (Lagadec and Topper, 2012: 30) to deal with hyper-complex, systemic risks and global volatility issues.

2.1. Crisis definition

A review of various crisis definitions in the literature reveals that the term has passed through several themes. One theme is the threat-opportunity perspective, or more explicitly negative-positive approach. Some scholars tend to associate crisis with negative connotations in either crisis causes or crisis impact. Crisis was often referred as unexpected, unwanted, unmanageable, a threat, a surprise and a disruption in which the manner it was approached was non-routine and consumed a lot of resources. This negative perspective was reflected in the definitions offered by many theorists (eg. Nystrom and Starbuck, 1984; Shrivastava et al., 1987; Rosenthal et al., 2001; Ulmer et al., 2007; Coombs, 2012). Another stream of scholars called for an alternative view towards crisis by looking at its potentials and opportunities. This view becomes more dominant in the literature. Indeed, crisis can lead to negative or positive outcomes. Those scholars claim that organizational crisis is an opportunity for developing and changing redundant system which might be originally one of the causes for crisis. Examples of this stream can be found in Milburn et al., (1983); Fink, (1986); Pauchant and Mitroff, (1992); Mishra, (1996); Pearson and Clair, (1998); Robert and Lajtha, (2002); Smith and Elliott, (2007); Jaques, (2010); Alas et al., (2011); Crandall et al., (2013).

The second theme found in the literature regarding crisis definition is single discipline adoption versus multidisciplinary approach. Definition of crisis offered by Pearson and Clear (1998) has been considered an ideal example representing its multi-disciplinary nature (Crandall et al., 2013). They defined crisis as:

"A low-probability, high-impact situation that is perceived by critical stakeholders to threaten the viability of the organization and that is subjectively experienced by these individuals as personally and socially threatening. Ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution of the organizational crisis will lead to disillusionment or loss of psychic and shared meaning, as well as to the shattering of commonly held beliefs and values and individuals' basic assumptions. During the crisis, decision making is pressed by perceived time constraints and coloured by cognitive limitations." (Pearson and Clair, 1998).

Contrastingly, some others have adopted a single discipline or perspective as a base for their research. Three different perspectives for defining crisis have been used, i.e. psychological (Nystrom and Starbuck, 1984; Weick, 1989; Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992; Richardson, 1995; Pergel and Psychogios, 2013); social-political (Turner, 1976; O'Connor, 1987; Shrivastava, 1993; Weick, 1989); and technological-structural (Perry, 1984; Pauchant and Douville, 1993).

2.2. Crisis management models

Models of crisis management have almost covered the same sets of activities; prevention, preparing, responding, and revising (Fink, 1986;

Mitroff et al., 1988; Pearson and Mitroff, 1993; Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt, 1995; Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt, 1996; Veil, 2011; Coombs, 2012). Prevention and preparation functions are usually addressed before crisis; responding function during the crisis while revising function after crisis. Analysis of the literature shows that crisis management models conceptualized by leading scholars in the subject differ depending on the scholar's school of thoughts, disciplines, and crisis emphasis.

Remarkably the majority of crisis management models have been constructed based on crisis life cycle. Crisis life cycle has been adopted from biological model whereby crisis is being likened an organism since both passed through the phases of birth, growth, maturity and decline (Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt, 1995). This analogy helps crisis researchers in studying crisis at different stages and thereby in understanding its evolution (Coombs, 2012; Crandall et al, 2013). However, the key flaw of the crisis life cycle models is that they are being presented in a linear fashion, proposing that events take place in a serial and sequential pattern, leading to some form of resolution (Jaques, 2007).

Analysis of these models shows that most of them are designed basically for event approach crisis (Mitroff et al., 1988; Pearson and Mitroff, 1993; Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt, 1996). This means that these models are less compatible with the new trend of crisis management. Although some scholars attempted to orient crisis models to be more proactive, yet there seems to be inadequacy in coping with the complexity and dynamic nature of crisis (Jaques, 2007). Jaques (2007) later introduces his model, called the "Issue and crisis management relational model" in a circular way which reflects the interaction and dynamicity among crisis stages in keeping with the life cycle fashion. Building upon Jaques' model, this paper attempts to submit a crisis conceptual model based on the premise that crisis management practices should not be seen as consecutive and chronological steps but as clusters of related and integrated activities that may overlap or happen concurrently.

3. Crisis management and organizational culture

Based on literature analysis, several observations can be made with regard to the role of organizational culture in crisis management. Initially, addressing organizational culture was almost a neglected terrain since more attention was given by scholars to find formal and technical solutions for crisis. Onion model for crisis management is one of the pioneers and most influential model that differentiates between crisis prepared organization and crisis prone (Mitroff et al., 1989). The onion model consists of four separated, highly interdependent layers representing the key factors that put the organization in a crisis prepared or crisis prone state. The four layers are; organizational strategies, organizational structure (which are the outer layers and most visible), organizational culture and

personnel psychology (which are at the core of the organization) (Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992).

Based on onion model; effective crisis management is all about preparing organizations for crisis (Pauchant and Mitroff, 1988; Smith, 1990; Pearson and Mitroff, 1993; Pearson and Clair, 1998). Organizational preparing for crisis entails preparing strategies, structure, culture and personnel simultaneously. The main factor that determines whether the organization is crisis prepared or crisis prone lies in its culture (Smith, 1990, Mitroff and Anagnos, 2001). Culture which we belong has heavy influence on our worldviews, behaviors and attitudes. There is a consensus among researchers that the culture of an organization can either support or defeat its crisis management practices (Fink, 1986; Mitroff et al., 1989; Smith, 1990; Smallman and Weir, 1999; Veil, 2011). The Challenger space shuttle incident in 1986 can be used to illustrate this point. It was found that NASA's closed communication culture was the main reason for its failure to execute its crisis plan (Marra, 1999). In other words; even if organizations have appropriate strategies and supported organizational structure for crisis management, the perceptions of top management and the organizational culture must also support crisis management practices in order to achieve positive outcomes. The existence of elaborated strategies and practices generate false signs of crisis preparedness, if it's not accompanied with top management and the organizational culture support (Pearson and Clair, 1998; Spillan, 2003).

Some organizations deny their vulnerability to crisis by using defense mechanisms. These mechanisms are rooted in their culture such as denial, idealization, disavowal and fixation (Mitroff and Anagnos, 2001). Argyris (1982) offers a very good definition of a defense mechanism as an "addition or subtraction from concrete reality that inhibits detection and correction of errors as well as detection of the unawareness that the actions are defensive" (in Roux-Dufort, 2007). Top management unawareness and ignorance develops an organizational climate and culture which may worsen up the events and turn them into crisis or even disaster. Furthermore organization culture determines how organizations learn from previous crises and how to embed this lesson in their crisis planning (Veil, 2011).

Creating crisis prepared culture has received an extensive discussion in the literature and many strategies have been suggested to convert the crisis prone organizations into crisis prepared organizations (Turner, 1976; Pauchant and Mitroff, 1988; Mitroff et al., 1989; Smith, 1990; Pauchant et al., 1991; Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992; Marra, 1999; Smallman and Weir, 1999; Sheaffer and Mano Negrin, 2003; Spillan, 2003; Elliott and Smith, 2006; Catino, 2008.). For instance, Turner (1976), one of the earliest scholars, suggested that cultural change can be achieved after an event of a highly symbolic crisis which will result a challenge and drastic shift to an organization's practice, Turner's argument

however contradicts the findings of later studies, as many organizations continued showing their resistance towards change even after experiencing symbolic crises (Elliott and Smith, 2006). Instead, Elliot and Smith (2006) argue that cultural readjustment process can be achieved even before crisis, through participative regulation. They reckon that participative style challenges organizations' basic assumptions and beliefs. Other similar strategies to challenge faulty basic assumptions in organizations include specialized stress management seminars and crisis simulations (Pauchant and Mitroff, 1988); and diminish blaming behaviours (Catino, 2008).

Open and flexible communication must be enhanced in the event of crises so that information can be passed quickly and directly throughout the organization. In contrary communication distortion is a common problem in many organizations (Faustenhammer and Gössler, 2011). This communication distortion must be prevented in order to achieve effective crisis management (Smallman and Weir, 1999). They pointed that both communication and culture must be taken into consideration as interrelated factors that affect proactive crisis management practices. Veil (2011) argued that the organization should adopt the Mindful Learning Model as an effective way of crisis management. Not only that this model may lessen the impact of crisis but it is also capable in preventing the crisis reoccurrence. The principle behind the Mindful Learning Model is that individuals can recognize the warning signals and learn from them to prevent crisis. "A mindful culture encourages constant adaptation of the routine processes as warning signals are recognized" (Veil, 2011: 135). In other words, culture is the determinant to a successful mindful learning model since routines; learning processes and communication are embedded into the culture.

4. Crisis management and organizational learning

Organizational learning refers to as the ability to perform two skills simultaneously. The first is the ability for generating, obtaining, interpreting, transferring, and retaining knowledge; and the second is the ability of its individual's to amend their behavior to respond in accordance with the new knowledge (Garvin et al., 2008). Organizational learning can be a source of organizational sustainable competitive advantage (Garvin et al., 2008; Sullivan and Beach, 2012). Furthermore organizational learning can facilitate and enhance adaptable and quick response systems (Senge, 1990; Dodgson, 1993).

The role of learning in crisis has long been established. More interestingly Mitroff's model for crisis management is the first to include learning as a distinguished stage. However learning tends to be treated as an afterthought, as the last step in crisis management process. So the main target was to

inhibit repetition of errors. As Veil (2011) puts it "learning is only included in the models as a process of improving the crisis response after the crisis has occurred" (p.119). Based on this premise, the cultural adjustment and modification will be held only after a crisis through post crisis learning. This view fails to recognize that learning, if internally embedded within an organizational culture, can exist throughout the crisis cycle particularly in the pre-crisis stage. In other words, cultural adjustment is actually a continuing process, and when approached properly it will definitely help in preventing crises.

Peter Senge had famously introduced his learning organization model which consists of five disciplines: i.e. "Shared Vision, Mental Models, Personal Mastery, Team Learning and Systems Thinking" (Senge, 1990). He argued that pulling together all those five disciplines will build a 'learning organization', and at the same time overcome organizational disabilities. Illustration of each of the five disciplines will be discussed below.

Shared Vision: The main emphasis is to shape both understanding and commitment towards a truly shared vision. Organizational shared vision should be set by dialogue and conversation in a way that release individuals' aspiration, faiths, and expectations. A shared consensus on the vision means that individuals can cooperate effectively with no resistance. Tools such as Positive Visioning, Concept-shifting and Values Alignment are used to create a shared vision (Senge, 1990).

Mental Models: One key to change success is in surfacing deep-seated mental models - beliefs, values, mind-sets and assumptions that determine the way people think and act. Getting in touch with the thinking going on about change in your workplace, challenging or clarifying assumptions and encouraging people to reframe is essential (Senge, 1990).

Personal Mastery is centrally to do with 'self-awareness' - how much we know about ourselves and the impact of our behaviors on others. Personal mastery is the human face of change - to manage change relationships sensitively, to be willing to have our own beliefs and values challenged and to ensure our change interactions and behaviors are reliable, consistent and principled (Senge, 1990).

Team Learning can be achieved when teams start thinking together, and sharing their experiences, insights, knowledge and skills with each other about how to do things better. Teams develop reflection, inquiry and discussion skills to conduct more skillful change conversations with each other which form the basis for creating a shared vision of change and deciding on common commitments to action. Teams use the action learning cycle rigorously in making changes in their work (Senge, 1990).

Systems thinking are a framework for seeing inter-relationships that underlie complex situations and interactions rather than simplistic (and mostly inaccurate) linear cause-effect chains. It enables teams to unravel the often hidden subtleties,

influences, leverage points and intended/unintended consequences of change plans and programs and leads to deeper, more complete awareness of the interconnections behind changing any system (Senge, 1990).

The above discussion points out to the vital role of learning in improving organizational likelihoods of persisting imminent coming crises. As mentioned before, organizations need to recognize that effective crisis management was never about application of pre-written plans or procedures which consist of what managers should do precisely when crisis strike. Rather, effective crisis management is all about the ability to handle crises based on organizational capabilities in detecting and managing crises and its unexpected dimensions. In this context organized and on-going learning activities are pertinent to aid organizations in building such capabilities (Robert and Lajtha, 2002).

5. The integrated model - a proposition

To recap the previous discussion, the existing understanding on crisis management has fallen short in some ways. Firstly, the key models in crisis management have been constructed based on linear and sequential fashion whereby crisis is viewed and handled as one life cycle with distinct, disintegrated stages. This fragmentation is less than accurate because it gives the impression that each of these stages exists as a rigid entity and can be handled independently from each other. This view also suggests that a particular crisis stage could only begin after the prior stage finished. This is a very mechanical rather than natural and fluid approach to crisis management. And as argued earlier, this perspective is totally ill-fitted to the reality, complexity and dynamic nature of crises and business organizations. The literature has shown that in many ways the crisis stages in fact overlap and interaction between the stages takes place at any time throughout the crisis life cycle.

Secondly, although barriers in organizational culture have been fairly synthesized in the literature, however they have not been holistically addressed throughout the crisis life cycle. Some scholars were interested in studying the characteristics of organizational culture that inhibit organization at the adoption stage in crisis management program (e.g. Pauchant and Mitroff, 1988; Mitroff et al, 1989; Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992; Elliot et al., 2000). While others focused on the crisis event and the ways organization culture could aid and facilitate in responding and recovering from the crisis (Smallman and Weir, 1999). Another group of researchers examined the cultural barriers in the aspect of learning from crisis after it happened (Veil, 2011; Smith and Elliot, 200; Elliot et al., 2000). This evidence suggests that the existing knowledge in this topic is relatively fragmented to allow a comprehensive understanding on the issue.

Thirdly, the literature shows that learning was included in the crisis management models as a

response to crisis, *after* it has struck organizations (Jaques, 2010). This suggests that cultural change would only occur at the post crisis stage. This view fail to acknowledge that cultural adjustment ideally should be an on-going effort whereby organizations need to embrace learning throughout the crisis cycle, particularly in the pre-crisis stage, in order to create an effective crisis management system. Moreover, mere post-crisis analysis leads to hindsight bias, which in turn provides just one best way to learn (Veil, 2011).

“Conceptual model is an abstraction of the way we choose to perceive a specific part, function, property or aspect of reality” (Jonker and Pennink, 2009: 43). Based on the above gaps in the literature, the authors wish to propose a conceptual model known as the ‘Integrated Model for Organizational Cultural Barriers to Crisis Management’ was designed (Figure 1). The model depicts the cultural barriers throughout the crisis cycle and highlights the potential of organizational learning in overcoming those barriers. The model was conceptualized by extending the works of Jaques’ Issue and Crisis Management Relational Model (2007; 2010); Veil’s (2011) cultural barriers from his Mindful Learning Model; and Senge’s (1990) Organizational Learning Model.

The proposed model differs from the existing models in the following manner. Firstly, unlike the linear approach of the other crisis management models, the proposed model takes in the form of circular fashion to emphasize the overlapping nature of the crisis stages, hence the need to handle them simultaneously. Secondly, this model integrates the importance of organizational culture throughout the crisis stages which has not been fully addressed in previous studies. The authors believed that the impact of any of the organizational cultural barriers is not limited to pre-specified stage but extends to all the remaining stages. Thirdly, while the previous models only address organizational learning as the last stage to acquire lessons from crisis for the planning of coming crises, the proposed model places organizational learning as throughout the crisis stages. In this way, organizational learning is viewed and regarded as an ongoing activity that addresses and overcome organizational cultural barriers.

As shown in Fig. 1, effective crisis management has been located at the core of the Integrated Model. Effectiveness aims not only to prevent crisis from occurring but to manage those which have already occurred. The model consists of three stages: i.e. Pre Crisis Stage, Crisis Stage, and Post Crisis Stage. Referring to Veil (2011), each stage comes with own functions: i.e. Signal detection, preparing and planning; Damage containment and recovery; and Learning and Resilience. Given the vital role of organizational culture in crisis management, the middle layer from this model presents the cultural barriers that inhibit proper handling of the crisis management functions therefore may result ineffective crisis management. As discussed in the

literature, these barriers have been identified as the main cultural characteristics of crisis prone organizations. The dotted circle shows that those barriers may not be necessarily found in all organizations.

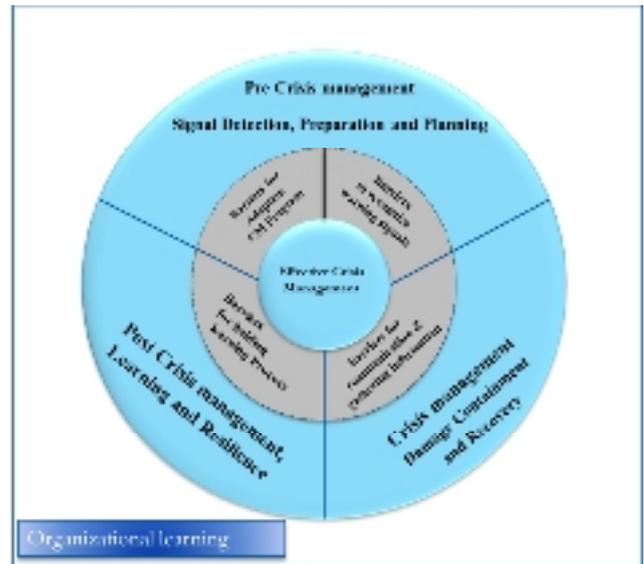


Fig. 1: Integrated model for organizational cultural barriers to crisis management

The Integrated Model draws attention to those barriers at different stages. At the Pre-Crisis stage, emphasis is placed on crisis prevention and crisis preparation and planning. The organizational cultural barriers can be divided into two clusters. The first cluster is the cultural barriers for crisis management adoption and the second cluster is the cultural barriers to recognizing and detecting warning signals. It is almost agreed in the literature that denial and holding other faulty assumption play an essential role in inhibiting the organization from crisis management program adoption. Those faulty assumptions have been extensively discussed in Mitroff et al., (1989) and other subsequent studies by Mitroff and his colleagues. They have presented more than 15 faulty organizational assumptions and beliefs which are directly related in inhibiting adoption of crisis management program and consequently put organizations as crisis prone organizations. Mitroff et al. (1989) believed that those assumptions may either give organizations an impression that their organizations are immune to crises or being used as excuses for ignoring crisis management. The Integrated Model embeds these faulty assumptions and beliefs into the crisis stages so that the influence of each assumption and beliefs can be studied and understood throughout the stages. The cultural barriers to recognizing and detecting warning signal have been identified by Veil, (2011) who argued that, Classification with experience, reliance on success, and trained mindlessness are the organizational cultural barriers to diagnose and identify crisis warning signals. Veil , (2011) believed that organizational culture that focuses exclusively on past experience and success can thwart future success by blinding the

organization to potential failure, because crisis can build slowly, organizations that do not seek out failure are unaware to the warning signals that do not align with the accepted culture of success. Additionally he thought that success sends supporting signals that no corrective action is necessary. With regards to the barrier trained mindlessness it means to be indifferent to the contexts, perspectives, and categories (Veil, 2011).

At the Crisis Stage where the emphasis is on damage containment and speed recovery, the organizational cultural barriers involve: difficulty in gathering information; ineffective communication; and information distortion. These barriers hinder communication when key information does not travel quickly to the right individuals. Finally at the Post-Crisis Stage, the emphasis is on resilience and learning from previous crisis. Learning provides organizations with lessons and new discoveries to prevent such crises, and to improve warning signal detection, damage containment and recovery mechanisms. The organizational cultural barriers at this stage are the blaming culture and searching for scapegoat which disable finding the root causes of the problem and hence fail the learning process.

It is important to highlight that although the Integrated Model shows fair distribution of organizational cultural barriers throughout the crisis life cycle, each of these barriers is not exclusive to any specific crisis stage. Rather, each barrier can still have an all-inclusive effect on each stage. This perspective is transpired with the circular design of the Integrated Model to represent the dynamic nature of the cultural barriers.

Organizational learning has been employed as the context for organizational cultural change in order to overcome organizational cultural barriers to effective crisis management. The Integrated Model refers to Senge (1990) given the high similarities of his so-called 'organizational disabilities' to the cultural barriers present in crisis management. Hence, each discipline in the Senge's model addresses one or more cultural barriers. For instance; mental models discipline looks into the denial barriers to the adoption crisis management program by shifting the mind-set and challenging the basic assumptions and beliefs. Personal mastery discipline helps in seeing reality objectively by building "self-awareness". While building shared vision and team learning help in making individuals work together towards predefined and agreed goals and objectives, hence enhancing information gathering, sharing and creating flexible communication. System thinking is needed for effective crisis management because of the increased complexity and dynamicity in organizations. From the systems perspective, individuals are made part of the feedback process. In mastering systems thinking, every individual shares responsibility for problems hence helping to create no-blame organizational culture.

The main drive behind the Integrated Model lies in the commitment of top management. This group

must be aware about the danger and inevitability of crisis. Their commitment is a pre-requisite to proper planning and planning for crisis management. It is worth noting that the personality and core beliefs of senior management have a great influence on organizational culture. Basically the crisis prone organizations are managed by personnel who deny the reality and depend heavily on the defense mechanisms and faulty assumptions. Regrettably managers' faulty assumptions not only affect the adoption of crisis management program but also extend to hinder the crisis management practices during crisis and the learning process from crisis.

6. Conclusion

This paper aims to fill a gap in the existing crisis management models which, based on reviews of literatures, have fallen short in providing a holistic understanding on the impacts of cultural barriers in the crisis life cycle and have not fully maximized the potentials of organizational learning in managing crisis effectively. Drawn upon the theories of crisis, organizational culture and organizational learning the paper attempts to address this gap by proposing an Integrated Model for Organizational Cultural Barriers to Crisis Management. The model depicts the cultural barriers throughout the crisis cycle and highlights the potential of organizational learning in overcoming those barriers.

Reviews of literature have shown that the topic of crisis management, although has received good research interest, its knowledge so far is rather disintegrated. Combining these pieces of information together and informed by the key models as previously mentioned, the authors designed and proposed the Integrated Model. Uniqueness and contribution of the model are threefold. Its cycle approach highlights that crisis stages are in fact dynamic, fluid and overlapping, rather than rigid and sequential. The crucial role of organizational culture is emphasized throughout the crisis stages. And finally, organizational learning is viewed as an ongoing process as the approach to handle crisis barriers throughout its life cycle stages.

The proposed model is only conceptual framework. It serves as the first step in building a better understanding of organizational culture in the context of crisis management. The next step is to conduct empirical research in different industries to test and refine the model.

References

- Alas, R., Gao, J., and Gao, M. J. (2011). Crisis Management in Chinese Organizations. Palgrave Macmillan.
- AlBattat, A. R., and MatSom, A. P. (2014). Emergency planning and disaster recovery in Malaysian hospitality industry. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 144, 45-53

- Argyris, C. and Schön, D. A. 1978. *Organizational Learning: a Theory of Action Perspective*, Addison-Wesley Reading, MA.
- Burnett, J. 1998. A Strategic Approach to Managing Crises. *Public Relations Review*, 24, 475-488.
- Catino, M. 2008. A review of literature: individual blame vs. organizational function logics in accident analysis. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 16, 53-62.
- Coombs, W. T. 2012. *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, managing, and responding*, Sage Publications.
- Crandall, W. R., Parnell, J. A., and Spillan, J. E. (2013). *Crisis Management: Leading in the New Strategy Landscape*. Sage Publications.
- Dodgson, M. (1993). Organizational learning: a review of some literatures. *Organization studies*, 14(3), 375-394.
- Elliott, D., and Smith, D. (2006). Cultural Readjustment after Crisis: Regulation and Learning from Crisis Within the UK Soccer Industry. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(2), 289-317.
- Elliott, D., Smith, D., and McGuinness, M. (2000). Exploring the Failure to Learn: Crises and the Barriers to Learning. *Review of Business-Saint Johns University*, 21(3), 17-24.
- Faulkner, B. (2001). Towards a Framework for Tourism Disaster Management. *Tourism Management*, 22(2), 135-147.
- Faustenhammer, A. and Gössler, M. 2011. Preparing for the Next Crisis: What can Organizations do to Prepare Managers for an Uncertain Future? *Business Strategy Series*, 12, 51-55.
- Fink, S. 1986. *Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable*, American Management Association New York.
- Fowler, K. L., Kling, N. D. and Larson, M. D. 2007. Organizational preparedness for coping with a major crisis or disaster. *Business and Society*, 46, 88-103.
- Garvin, D. A., Edmondson, A. C., and Gino, F. (2008). Is yours a Learning Organization?. *Harvard business review*, 86(3), 109.
- Gonzalez-Herrero, A. and Pratt, C. B. 1995. How to manage a crisis before-or whenever-it hits. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 40, 25-25.
- Gonzalez-Herrero, A. G. and Pratt, C. B. 1996. An Integrated Symmetrical Model for Crisis-Communications Management. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 8, 79-105.
- Hilliard, T. W., Scott-Halsell, S., and Palakurthi, R. (2011). Core crisis Preparedness Measures Implemented by Meeting Planners. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, 20(6), 638-660
- James, E. H., Wooten, L. P., and Dushek, K. (2011). Crisis Management: Informing a New Leadership Research Agenda. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 5(1), 455-493.
- Jaques, T. 2010. Reshaping crisis management: The challenge for organizational design. *Organization Development Journal*, 28.
- Jaques, T. 2007. Issue Management and Crisis Management: An Integrated, Non-linear, Relational Construct. *Public Relations Review*, 33(2), 147-157.
- Jonker, J., and Pennink, B. W. (2009). Conceptual Models. In *The Essence of Research Methodology* (pp. 43-63). Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
- Lagadec, P. and Topper, B. 2012. How Crises Model the Modern World. *Journal of Risk Analysis and Crisis Response*, 2, 21-33.
- Liu, X., Chang, Z., and Zhao, P. (2009). Is it simply a matter of managerial competence? Interpreting Chinese executives' perceptions of crisis management. *Public Relations Review*, 35, 232-239.
- Marra, F. J. 1999. Crisis Communication Plans: Poor Predictors of Excellent Crisis Public Relations. *Public Relations Review*, 24, 461-474.
- Milburn, T. W., Schuler, R. S., and Watman, K. H. (1983). Organizational Crisis. Part II: Strategies and Responses. *Human Relations*, 36(12), 1161-1179.
- Mishra, A. K. (1996). *Organizational Responses to Crisis: The Centrality of Trust*. Sage, 261, 287. Chicago.
- Mitroff, I. I. (2005). *Why Some Companies Emerge Stronger and Better From a Crisis: 7 Essential Lessons For Surviving Disaster*. Amacom Div American Mgmt Assn.
- Mitroff, I. I., Alpaslan, M. C. and Green, S. E. 2004. Crises as Ill Structured Messes. *International Studies Review*, 6, 165-194.
- Mitroff, I. I., and Alpaslan, M. C. (2003). *Preparing for Evil*. Harvard Business School Pub.
- Mitroff, I. I., Pauchant, T. and Shrivastava, P. 1988a. Forming a Crisis Portfolio. *Security Management*, 33, 101-8.
- Mitroff, I. I., Pauchant, T., Finney, M. and Pearson, C. 1989. Do (Some) Organizations Cause their Own Crises? The Cultural Profiles of Crisis-Prone Vs. Crisis-Prepared Organizations. *Organization and Environment*, 3, 269-283.
- Mitroff, I., and Anagnos, G. (2001). *Managing Crisis before the happen. What every executive and manager needs to know about crisis*

- management. Ed. Amacom, 1ra. Edición, Barcelona.
- Nystrom, P. C., and Starbuck, W. H. (1984). To Avoid Organizational Crises, *Unlearn. Organizational dynamics*, 12(4), 53-65.
- O'Connor, J. 1987. *The Meaning of Crisis: A Theoretical Introduction*, Basil Blackwell Oxford.
- Pauchant, T. C. and Douville, R. 1993. Recent Research in Crisis Management: A Study of 24 Authors' Publications from 1986 to 1991. *Organization and Environment*, 7, 43-66.
- Pauchant, T. C. and Mitroff, I. I. 1992. Transforming the Crisis-Prone Organization: Preventing Individual, Organizational, and Environmental Tragedies, *Jossey-Bass*.
- Pauchant, T. C., and Mitroff, I. I. (1988). Crisis Prone Versus Crisis Avoiding Organizations is Your Company's Culture its Own Worst Enemy in Creating Crises?. *Organization and Environment*, 2(1), 53-63.
- Pauchant, T. C., Mitroff, I. I., and Lagadec, P. (1991). Toward a Systemic Crisis Management Strategy: Learning From the Best Examples in the US, Canada and France. *Organization and Environment*, 5(3), 209-232.
- Pearson, C. M. and Clair, J. A. 1998. Reframing Crisis Management. *Academy of management review*, 23, 59-76.
- Pearson, C. M. and Mitroff, I. I. 1993. From crisis prone to crisis prepared: A framework for crisis management. *The academy of management executive*, 7, 48-59.
- Penrose, J. M. 2000. The Role of Perception In Crisis Planning. *Public Relations Review*, 26, 155-171.
- Perghel, R., and Psychogios, A. G. (2013). Making Sense of Crisis: Cognitive Barriers of Learning in Critical Situations. *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, 1(2), 179.
- Perrow, C. (1984). *Normal accidents: Living with high risk systems*. New York.
- Richardson, B. 1995. Paradox Management for Crisis Avoidance. *Management Decision*, 33, 5-18.
- Robert, B. and Lajtha, C. 2002. A New Approach to Crisis Management. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 10, 181-191.
- Rosenthal, U., Boin, A. and Comfort, L. K. (Eds.). (2001). *Managing Crises: Threats, Dilemmas, Opportunities*. Springfield: Charles C Thomas.
- Roux-Dufort, C. (2000). Why Organizations don't Learn from Crises: The Perverse Power of Normalization. *Review of Business-Saint Johns University*, 21(3), 25-30.
- Roux-Dufort, C., Is Crisis Management (Only) a Management of Exceptions?. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, Vol 15 No 2 June 2007., 105-114.
- Schraeder, M., Tears, R. S. and Jordan, M. H. 2005. Organizational Culture In Public Sector Organizations: Promoting change through training and leading by example. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 26, 492-502.
- Senge, P. M. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York.
- Sheaffer, Z. and Mano-Negrin, R. (2003). Executives' Orientations as Indicators of Crisis Management Policies and Practices. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40, (2), 573-606.
- Shrivastava, P. 1993. Crisis Theory/Practice: Towards a Sustainable Future. *Organization and environment*, 7, 23-42.
- Shrivastava, P., Mitroff, I. I., Miller, D., and Miclani, A. (1987). Understanding Industrial Crises [1]. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25(4), 285-303.
- Smallman, C. and Weir, D. 1999. Communication and Cultural Distortion During Crises. *Disaster Prevention and Management*, 8, 33-41.
- Smith, D. 1990. Beyond contingency planning: Towards a model of crisis management. *Organization and environment*, 4, 263-275.
- Smith, D., and Elliott, D. (2007). Exploring the Barriers to Learning from Crisis Organizational Learning and Crisis. *Management Learning*, 38(5), 519-538.
- Spillan, J. E. 2003. An Exploratory Model for Evaluating Crisis Events and Managers' Concerns in Non Profit Organisations. *Journal of contingencies and crisis Management*, 11, 160-169.
- Stead, E., and Smallman, C. (1999). Understanding Business Failure: Learning and Un Learning from Industrial Crises. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 7(1), 1-18.
- Sullivan, J., and Beach, R. (2011). Making organizational learning work: Lessons from a high reliability organization. In *Proceedings of the 7th European Conference on Management, Leadership and Governance* (p. 387). Academic Conferences Limited.
- Turner, B. A. 1976. The Organizational And Interorganizational Development Of Disasters. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 378-397.
- Ulmer, R. R., Seeger, M. W., and Sellnow, T. L. (2007). Post-Crisis Communication And Renewal: Expanding the Parameters of Post-Crisis Discourse. *Public Relations Review*, 33(2), 130-134.
- Veil, S. R. 2011. Mindful Learning In Crisis Management. *Journal Of Business Communication*, 48, 116-147.

Weick, K. E. 1989. Mental Models Of High Reliability Systems. *Organization and Environment*, 3, 127-142.